Practical Discourses

UPON THE

PARABLES

OF OUR

Blessed Saviour,

WITH

Prayers annex'd to each Discourse.

By FRANCIS BRAGGE, Vicar of *Hitchin* in *Hertfordshire*.

Utile est, [Libros] Plures à Pluribus fieri, diversa stilo, non diversâ Fide, etiam de Quæstionibus Iisdem; ut ad Plurimos, ad alios sic, ad alios autem sic, Res ipsa perveniat. Augustin. de Trinitate. Lib. 1. Cap. 3.

IMPRIMATUR,
Sept. 27. 1693. *Guil. Lancaster* R. P. D.
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To the Right Reverend Father in God *Thomas* Lord Biſhop of *Lincoln.*

My Lord,

I Humbly beg your Lordſhips Favourable Acceptance of this Addreſs; which is deſign'd as a Publick Expreſſion of the Great Veneration I have for your Lordſhip, and of the Grateful Senſe I retain of the Favour and Incouragement you have hitherto been Pleaſed to ſhew me, ſince your Happy Acceſſion to this See.

I do not, cannot think this a Preſent worthy of your Lordſhip; but being induc'd to publiſh theſe Diſcourſes, in hopes that the Novelty of the Dreſs they appear in, may incline ſome to look upon them, who ſeldom take notice of things of this

nature when in the uſual Garb: I could not but Dedicate them to your Lordſhip, as my Dioceſan, and as an Account in part how I diſcharge my Duty in my Cure, under your Lordſhips Inſpection and Government.

If I ſhall be ſo Happy as to do any Service to God and Religion by this Publication, I am ſure your Lordſhip will not diſapprove of it, and I ſhall have what I aim at: I therefore beg your Lordſhips Bleſſing, and your Prayers, that theſe my *well-meant* Endeavours (however otherwiſe Deficient) may be Succeſsful to that Great End: And with all due Deference to your Lordſhips Eminent Worth as well as Station, I am, and ſhall make it my Care to Approve my ſelf,

My LORD,

Your Lordſhips Dutiful and Humble Servant,

Fr. Bragge.

THE

THE PREFACE.

THE Parables of our Saviour being full of Excellent Inſtruction, and in a Familiar way teaching the Greateſt and moſt Neceſſary Truths; I thought it would be a very uſeful Undertaking to Diſcourſe Practically upon them: And by explaining *them, and enforcing the Senſe couch'd under them, to make them ſerviceable to the Great Ends for which they were deſign'd. The engaging Men in a Hearty Love and Obedience to our Great Maſter Jeſus, and in an Induſtrious Proviſion for the Happineſs of the other World.*

But before I proceed to conſider the Parables themſelves, I think 'twill be convenient to give a Brief Account, why our Saviour ſo often ſpake in that Myſtical *Manner to his Hearers? And 'tis a Queſtion which his own Diſciples ask'd him, after he had deliver'd his firſt Parable of a* Sower; *they came unto him and ſaid,* Why ſpeakeſt thou unto them in Parables? *Matt.* 13. 10. *To this our Lord gives a double Anſwer in the* 11*th and following Verſes, thus. I ſpeak to the People in Parables,* becauſe it is given to you, *that are true Believers and my Faithful Diſciples,* to know the Myſteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, *or of the Goſpel;* but to them, *that is, as they are deſcribed in the* 15*th Verſe,* whoſe Heart is waxed Groſs, *or Obdurate and Obſtinate,* and their Ears

dull of Hearing, and who have closed, *or willfully shut* their Eyes *against the Light and Truth that I manifest to the World*, lest at any time they should see with their Eyes, and Hear with their Ears, and Understand with their Heart, and should be Converted and I should Heal them: *To such as these, as very Unworthy of the Favour*, it is not given *to have the Mysteries of Religion* plainly *reveal'd to them but only* Mystically, *and* Covertly *by way of* Parable. *That is, 'twas by way of* Punishment *for their Infidelity and Hardness of Heart, and Despising and Rejecting His former* Plainer *Discourses on the Mount and in other Places; and their Averseness to believe in him notwithstanding the* Miracles *he did, and Blasphemous Attributing his casting out a Devil from one possessed who was* Blind *and* Dumb, *to the Power of* Beelzebub *the Prince of the* Devils: *'Twas by way of Punishment for this Strange* Obduracy *of theirs that he took upon him that more* Obscure *way of Instructing them than he before had used; and which new Practice of his, was a tacit Intimation of his* Displeasure *against them, and did threaten a* Total *Concealment of those Glad Tidings from them which he came to bring unto the World, if they persisted in their Obstinacy and Disbelief.*

And this is manifest from the whole of what St. Matthew *records of our Lord's Discourses* before *this 13th Chapter; which we find to be very* Plain *and expressed in the* usual *manner, till the Pharisees with Hellish Malice would disparage the Great Miracle he wrought upon the* possessed Man, *by ascribing it to* Art-Magick *and the Power of*

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the Devil: *And from* that *Time, after Confounding that Objection, and ſharply reproving their* Perverſeneſs *and great Obſtinacy, he very frequently expreſs'd himſelf by way of* Parable *in his publick Diſcourſes, and afterwards in private explained all to his Diſciples; and he gives this reaſon for his ſo doing, verſe* 12. For whoſoever hath, to him ſhall be given, and he ſhall have more Abundance; but whoſoever hath not, from him ſhall be taken away even that he hath. *That is, He that upon my former* Plain *and* Open *Inſtructions hath Believed and Obeyed me, ſhall have ſtill more and more as Plain Manifeſtations made to him of the Myſteries of the Goſpel: But he that hath made no Good Uſe of what was then ſo* clearly *made known to him, but continu'd ſtill Faithleſs and Obſtinate, ſhall for the Future be Depriv'd of that full Light and* Sun-ſhine *of the Goſpel, and be afforded only ſome Obſcurer* Glimmerings *of it, and behold it as through a* Veil. *A Puniſhment this, had they underſtood it, very Great; and which was enough to cure them of their* Stubbornneſs, *and make them more ready to embrace that Heavenly Diſcipline before it was too* Late; *For that* Eclipſe *of that Glorious Light, was a certain fore-runner of that Eternal* Night *which was to follow, unleſs they ſpeedily Repented and Believ'd. And this ſhould be an Admonition to* us *likewiſe to Fear and Tremble and walk with the greateſt Circumſpection, leſt we Fall after the ſame Example of* Unbelief *and Diſobedience; leſt we ſo long Reject that Light which is come into the World and prefer Darkneſs before it, as to become utterly unworthy of it, and it be quite hid from our Eyes, and outer Darkneſs at laſt become our Portion.* This

This is one *Reaſon our Lord gives of his ſpeaking to the People in* Parables; *it was by way of* Puniſhment, *and as an Expreſſion of his Diſpleaſure at their* hardned Infidelity.

There is another, *and that a very* Merciful *one, as reſpecting a ſort of People not* Maliciouſly *Faulty as thoſe before-mention'd, but chiefly to blame for* Heedleſs Inadvertency; *'tis thus expreſs'd,* v. 13. *of this* 13. *ch.* Therefore ſpeak I to them in Parables, becauſe they ſeeing ſee not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they underſtand. *That is, becauſe his Plainer and more Common Diſcourſes were but little regarded by them, and not* conſider'd *and* attended *to as they ſhould be, but forgotten as ſoon as heard; therefore the more to engage their* Attention, *and induce them to look* cloſe *into and* dwell *longer upon what he ſaid, he put his Diſcourſes into a more* Myſtical *and uncommon Dreſs; that their deſire of underſtanding his* hidden *Meaning, might employ more of their Thoughts about it, and put them upon making a further enquiry than otherwiſe they would do, and by that means his Doctrine make a deeper Impreſſion upon their Minds and Memories. For Men are naturally deſirous of finding out* Myſteries *and* Hidden *Meanings, and more than ordinary Attentive to what is unuſual and out of the common road of talking, and will take* Pains *to diſcover what is under the Diſguiſe of a* Parable, *and be much more pleaſed and affected with the Diſcovery of ſuch a* hidden Treaſure *(to which our Lord elſewhere reſembles the Goſpel) than if the ſame thing had been offer'd them at an eaſier Rate. And accordingly St.* Luke, *after he had recorded ſeveral*

of

of our Saviour's Parables, *ſubjoyns that all the People were* very Attentive to hear him; *and no Doubt but they were as Inquiſitive to* Underſtand *what they had heard.*

And indeed, tho' this be a Myſtical *way of Inſtruction, and hath ſomething of* Obſcurity *in it, yet as it may be manag'd, nothing can be more* Familiar, *or more ſuitable to the Capacities of the Meaneſt Auditors. For the vulgar ſort are but little Receptive of* Abſtracted *Notions, and Nice and Lofty Speculations; and* that *is moſt likely to take with* them, *which is cloathed in a Dreſs they have been well acquainted with, and Illuſtrated by ſome Material Repreſentation: For by this means, a Truth which otherwiſe deliver'd they would either not Apprehend, or not* Conſider *and Attend to; being expreſs'd by way of Reſemblance to what they have been much uſed to, and underſtand very well, is preſently entertain'd, and becomes Familiar and Eaſie to them, and they can as well remember and attend to it, as to other common Concerns of Life. And accordingly we find our Lord's Parables taken either from ſome common and known* Actions of Men, *ſuch as of* a Husband-man ſowing Corn in his Field, and the ſpringing up of Weeds with the good Corn, *of a* Fiſher throwing his Net into the Sea, *of the* looking for a loſt Sheep, *and the* Extravagancies and Repentance of a Prodigal Son, *and the like; or from ſome common* Accidents *and* Events *that are taken notice of in the World, ſuch as of a* Treaſure found that was hid in a Field, the Plentiful Product of a Man's Ground, *the Unfruitfulneſs of a Tree, the* Reckoning of a Maſter with his Servants,

Servants, the Importunacy of a Poor Widow for Justice, *and such like. Relations of this nature are easily* Remembred, *and People are naturally apt to* listen *and* attend *to them, and the meanest Capacity can* understand *and* apprehend *them, and if well manag'd, they make what is repesented by them appear very* Lively *and* Affecting, *as if 'twere* Acted *before our Eyes; and by this means the Truths deliver'd under that Disguise insensibly Insinuate themselves, and work upon the Mind even before a Man is aware of it, or can set himself to make Resistance.*

And as these Parables of our Lord were drawn from the most Familiar *things, they were so* Apt *likewise, and so excellently* Manag'd, *and there was so great Analogy between the things represented and the Representations of them, that a little* Thought *and* Reflection *of even an ordinary Understanding, would discover what was hid under so thin a Veil: And accordingly we find several of our Saviour's Parables taken presently by the Auditors in their true and naked meaning, and no doubt but more were so than the Evangelists took notice of. But least they should not be apprehended, we find our Lord, when in Private, explaining them to his Disciples, and giving them command to* speak in the Light what he told them in Darkness; *and by this means, that Impression which the Parable made upon the* Fancy *and* Imagination *of the People at the first relation of it, would afterwards either by Mens own Interpretation, or the Apostles, have its due effect upon their* Understandings, Wills *and* Affections.

Matt. 10. 27.

Besides this General Usefulness of Parables,

there

there is one thing they are more peculiarly proper for, and that is Reproof; which is a thing Men are most of all Impatient of, and that must be manag'd with great Prudence and Nicety, or it will do much more Harm than Good. If it be too Plain and Open and Severe, it often Hardens an Offender still more; and if it be too Cool and Lifeless, it loses its Force and makes no Impression.

In an Effectual Reproof then, there must be sufficient Strength and Smartness, and likewise so much Privacy and Secrecy in it, as may not exasperate the Man too much from a Sence of the great Shame and Ignominy that attends the laying Open his Faults to the World. Now Reproving by way of Parable does all this. There may be Strength and Smartness enough in it if it be well chosen and applied; and yet there is so much of a Disguise and Covering upon it, as makes it very Private, and not to grate so much upon that Tender Passion of Shame, as a more publick and barefac'd Reproof would do. 'Tis, as one handsomly expresses it, like Lancing a Sore with the Lancet wrapt up in a Sponge; when under Pretence and Shew of nothing but smooth and gentle Usage, the place is unexpectedly open'd and the Corruption let out; which the Patient would not have suffer'd to be done, if attempted Roughly and without that Stratagem. And there is a notable Instance of this Parabolical way of Reproving, mention'd 2 Sam. 12. Upon David's Murder of Uriah, that he might enjoy his Wife without Disturbance, the Prophet Nathan was sent to Reprove him for it, and denounce God's Great Displeasure against him: And that he might do this the more effectually, did not Flatly and Immediately

mediately tell him of his great Wickedneſs, but frames a Parable of a Rich Man that had great Flocks and Herds of his own, who yet to entertain his Gueſt, took the Only little Ewe Lamb *of a* Poor Neighbour *of his, which he had bought and nouriſh'd up with great Tenderneſs and Pleaſure; and dreſs'd it for the Man that was come to him.* And *David*'s Anger, *the Story ſays,* was greatly kindled againſt the Man, and he ſaid unto *Nathan,* as the Lord liveth the Man that hath done this thing ſhall ſurely die, and ſhall reſtore the Lamb Four-fold, becauſe he did this thing, and becauſe he had no Pity. *When the Prophet ſaw that his Deſign had ſo far taken effect, he immediately follows his Blow, takes Advantage of the Kings Diſpleaſure, and makes the Application home,* Thou art the Man. *And this Myſtical Reproof ſtruck* David *ſo deep, that without making any Excuſes, he preſently confeſſes his Guilt, that he had ſinned againſt the Lord; when 'tis very likely a Rougher and more Downright Reprimand would have exaſperated the King into Rage and Impatience at his being ſo expos'd by the Prophet, rather than have melted him into ſo humble and pungent a Remorſe as this.*

This Courſe then our Lord took, not without great Wiſdom; and by Parables apt and well choſen and very expreſſive of his Meaning, reproved the Obſtinacy, Hypocriſie, and other Vices of the Jews, who were Men Stubborn and Refractory, and Impatient of too open a Rebuke: Eſpecially the Phariſees, *whoſe* Pride *and* Haughtineſs, *and great Repute with the People, made them not able to endure any thing of* Reproof, *tho wrap'd up in the Diſguiſe*

of

of a Parable, *much leſs when publick and open, and in plainer Terms. Tho' as to the Phariſees, when this milder way would not do, he more plainly and ſharply rebuk'd and expos'd their Great Wickedneſs and Vile Hypocriſie.*

Theſe are the Reaſons why our Lord ſpake ſo much in Parables; *and 'twas a Courſe which many of the Greateſt and Wiſeſt Men had taken before him. The Prophets in the Old Teſtament, and ſeveral of the Heathens, expreſs'd their Inſtructions and Reproofs in ſuch a Myſtical manner, and by way of* Fable *or feigned Relation of ſome Action or Occurrence that bore Reſemblance to what they would Inculcate; as is very evident to ſuch as Converſe with their Writings. Which Courſe, had it not been very Effectual to the Ends for which it was deſign'd, it would not have been ſo much in Reputation as it was; and if it was ſo effectual then, why may it not be ſo ſtill; if not to frame* new Parables, *yet to explicate and inforce the Old? Eſpecially thoſe which our Lord, with admirable Wiſdom and Judgment, made uſe of to reprove Vice by, and encourage a Sincere and Perſevering Piety?*

The Truths that are couch'd under theſe Parabolical Expreſſions, *are of the greateſt Importance, and ſuch as it nearly concerns us to* attend to, *and Practice accordingly; and the manner of* expreſſing *them is ſuch, as illuſtrates with great Advantage, and very movingly recommends them, and that in ſuch a* Familiar *way, as fits them to all Capacities tho' never ſo Indifferent; and may be of great uſe to work upon the meaner ſort, who I fear are too little apprehenſive of what is deliver'd in more Abſtracted Terms.*

I have therefore Practically consider'd the most, and most useful of our Saviour's Parables, *passing by those only that wholly relate to the Jews, and that Infant State of the Gospel, and can't without* Violence *be made Serviceable to the Improvement of Religion amongst* Christians, *especially* now *at this Distance from the Times wherein they were spoken. But of this sort there are but Three or Four; and the rest that are not Particularly Discourſed of, are* Co-incident *and of the same* Senſe *with those that are. And I hope this may not be an* Unprofitable *Undertaking* thro' his Bleſſing who Alone can give the Increaſe; *to Advance whose Honour in promoting the Good of Souls they are made Publick.*

I desire only that two things may be further obſerv'd: The one is, That these Diſcourſes are on Purpoſe deſign'd to be Purely Practical, *as I have ſtil'd them in the Title Page, and as every Intelligent Reader will diſcern, when he finds me wave many Fair Opportunities of Controverſie that lie in my way; and my Reaſon for ſo doing, I think, is very ſufficient,* (viz.) *Becauſe 'tis too Obſervable that the great Defect of Chriſtians now-a-days is in their* Practice, *which yet is the* One thing Neceſſary. *The other is, that, According to the excellent Advice of* * Maimonides, *the Reader expect not* (Rationem & Explicationem omnium verborum & rerum in Parabola Contentarum ad Rem Significatum, &c.) *a Minute and Particular 'Application of every Word and Thing in a Pa-'rable, to the Senſe that is couch'd under it; but 'be contented with a more General Explication 'of the* Sum *and* Scope *of it. For otherwiſe either 'the main Intention of the Parable will be quite 'loſt,*

* *More Nevochim* in the Preface.

'loſt, or at leaſt the Mind will be tir'd in hunt-
'ing after an Explication of what cannot be ex-
'plain'd; and nothing be the Reſult of ſuch Fruit-
'leſs Study, but that Empty Vexatious Diſap-
'pointment, which all thoſe Experience, who make
'it their endeavour to find out, or rather force
'from the Words of an Author, that which the
'Author himſelf never ſo much as dream'd of.
'All therefore that a Man ſhould propoſe to him-
'ſelf in the Explication of the greateſt part of
'any Parable, is to find out what is the main
'Drift and Deſign of it; and what it is which
'the Author of it would Inſtruct Men in, by
'that Allegorical Scheme of Speech.

But tho' this be Excellent Advice, and I have endeavour'd to obſerve it in the following Diſcourſes; yet, where it could be done without unnatural Straining and Violence, I have been very Particular in my Explication: And indeed, moſt of our Saviour's Parables are ſo aptly expreſs'd in the Parts as well as in the Whole, that they not only will Bear but Require a Minute Application of the Allegory to that which is repreſented by it, and which receives a great Advantage from it; as may be obſerv'd in the Peruſal of what is now offer'd to the Reader's View.

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PARA-

PARABLE I.

Of the Sower that went forth to ſow his Seed.

Matth. xiii. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

Behold, a Sower went forth to ſow.

And when he ſowed, ſome Seeds fell by the Way-ſide, and the Fouls came and devoured them up.

Some fell upon ſtony Places, where they had not much Earth; and forthwith they ſprung up, becauſe they had no Deepneſs of Earth:

And when the Sun was up, they were ſcorched, and becauſe they had not Root they withered away.

And ſome fell among Thorns; and the Thorns ſprung up and choaked them.

But other fell into good Ground, and brought forth Fruit; ſome an Hundred-Fold, ſome Sixty-Fold, ſome Thirty-Fold.

THIS Parable is very fitly placed *firſt*, as giving Account of the *Cauſes* of Mens Fruitfulneſs or Unfruitfulneſs in Chriſtianity; and conſequently, ſhews what is to be *avoided*, and directs to what is to be *done*,

in order to Men's being *better'd* by the Sermons of the Goſpel: Which is a thing *firſt* of all to be taken notice of, by ſuch as would be *Chriſtians indeed.*

Matth. 13. 19. Mark 4. 14. Luk. 8.11. Our Lord's *Interpretation* of this Parable, from a Collation of the Three Evangeliſts that record it, is this:

The *Seed* is the *Word of God*, or the Word of the Kingdom; that is, the Goſpel, the Religion that Chriſt Jeſus came to teach the World. When any one heareth this Word, and *underſtandeth* it not, then cometh the wicked one or Satan immediately, and catcheth away that which was ſown in his Heart, leſt he ſhould *believe* and be *ſav'd*; this is he who receiv'd Seed by *the Way-ſide*. But he that receiv'd the Seed into *rocky* or Stony Places, is he that heareth the Word and preſently with *Joy* receiveth it, yet hath not *Root* in himſelf, and ſo endures or believes but for *a while*; for when *Tribulation or Perſecution* ariſeth becauſe of the Word, he is ſoon offended or diſcouraged, and falls away in Time of Temptation. He alſo that receiv'd Seed among the *Thorns*, is he that heareth the Word, and goeth forth, and the *Cares* of *this* World, and the Deceitfulneſs of *Riches*, and the *Luſts* and *Pleaſures* of this Life entring in, *choak* the Word, and it becometh *Unfruitful*, or at beſt bringeth no Fruit to *Perfection*. But, He that received Seed into the *good Ground*, is he that having heard the Word, *Underſtandeth*

derſtandeth, or *conſidereth* it, and receiveth and *keepeth* it in an *honeſt* and *good Heart*, and bringeth forth Fruit with *Patience*, according to his *Ability*, whether *Thirty*, *Sixty*, or an *Hundred-Fold*.

From the Parable thus interpreted by its Divine Author, it appears, as was ſaid, that the Deſign of it is to ſhew what are the *Cauſes* of Men's improving or not improving under the preaching of the Goſpel; that ſo we may know what to *avoid* and what to *embrace* and *endeavour after* in order to our being *fruitful* under thoſe Means of Inſtruction we enjoy.

We ſhall now conſider each Part of this Parable with its Interpretation.

The Firſt is, *Behold, a Sower went forth to ſow: And when he ſowed, ſome Seeds fell by the Wayes-ſide and were trodden down, and the Fowls of the Air came and devour'd them up:* The Interpretation is, that the *Seed* which is ſown is the *Word of God*, and when any one heareth this Word and *underſtandeth* it not, then cometh the *Devil* or the wicked one immediately, and catcheth away that which was ſown in his Heart, leſt he ſhould believe and be ſaved. This is he that receiv'd Seed by the Way-ſide, or this is that Seed which fell by the Way-ſide.

The Word of God is compared to *Seed*, becauſe of its *fructifying*, growing and encreaſing Nature; becauſe it hath in it an *Active* Principle, and will when ſown,

(unless kill'd and made unfruitful by Accidental Injuries) spring up into excellent Fruits and in great Abundance, to the *Glory* of *God*, and the nourishing, strengthening, nay the *immortalizing* of *Men*; for of this Divine *Seed* consists that Heavenly *Bread, which whoso eateth of shall live for ever.* 'Tis this Seed that bringeth forth those Graces of Christianity, which keep up the *Divine Life* in the Soul; 'tis this that makes it grow in Grace and in the Knowledg and Love of the best and noblest of Objects, our *Lord Jesus*; 'tis this that is its Preparation for Heaven, and an Earnest of that Immortal and Glorious Inheritance. For, whereſoever that Seed
Rom. 6. 22. is sown, and springs up, and *brings forth Fruit unto Holiness, the End* most certainly *will be Everlasting Life.*

And this Word of God, is not only, for these Reasons, compared to *Seed*, but to Seed *sown:* 'Tis not only *potentially* fruitful, but the Powers of it are now call'd forth into *Act*; 'tis *actually sown*, the Gospel is preach'd and made known to the World, its excellent Precepts are *openly* declar'd, and *planted* in Men's *Hearts*, by the Proposal of infinite Rewards and Punishments to such as *do* or do *not* obey and practise them. And, this Seed thus sown, is *water'd* with the Dews of Heaven, with the Distillations of the Divine Grace and Blessing, which are in sufficient Plenty afforded to every Man; so that

that God, the great *Husbandman*, is not wanting in any thing that is neceſſary to the Flouriſhing and Encreaſe of that Seed, which he hath thus committed to their Hearts: And therefore he expects (and 'tis but reaſonable he ſhould) to ſee it grow and bring forth Fruit where'ere 'tis planted; wherever the Word is preach'd he expects the Fruit of Righteouſneſs. The Seed is good, and moſt of all *agreeable* to the *Soil* wherein 'tis ſown (for *Religion* is the beſt *Reaſon*, and therefore moſt *natural* to a *reaſonable Soul*) and 'tis ſown in great *Plenty*; there is no Scarcity of God's Word among us, and 'tis water'd ſufficiently with the Dew of Heaven, the Grace of God, which is not wanting to any Man that will receive it, and therefore at our Peril we muſt all be *fruitful*; none of us muſt appear before our great Lord *empty*, leſt the Puniſhment of *Barrenneſs* be our Portion, and we be burnt up with *unquenchable Fire*.

This Seed then, or the Word of God, being ~~thus~~ *actually ſown*, the Chriſtian Religion planted in the World, and all things done on *God's* Part, in order to its being *fruitful*, and which accordingly he expects it *ſhould* be; it highly concerns *us*, in the next Place, to take care that it *be* ſo, and that nothing make it otherwiſe.

That is, that, in the Firſt Place, it be not like Seed ſown or ſcatter'd by the *Way Side*, which is trodden down by the

Feet of Men and Beasts, or devoured by the Fowls of the Air. We must not be thought *Aless* and *inconsiderate* after we have heard the Word, and suffer our Souls to be like a *High-way*, laid open and exposed to *all Comers*, to all Sorts of wandring, useless and wicked Thoughts, which thronging in Abundance, will trample down the Good Seed that was sown, that it shall never more appear, be no more thought of or remembred by us. Nor must we leave it to the Mercy of the *Fowls of the Air*, the Devil and his Legions, who, like Birds of Prey, hover over us continually, and are always ready to catch away immediately those good Instructions instill'd into our Minds, lest they should grow into Faith and Salvation, and which they see lye scattered and unregarded by us, and *unobserved*, throw in their Places, the Seeds of Sin and Misery, which, like ill Weeds, will flourish any where and grow apace. Thus *heedless* of so great a Treasure must we by no means be, but by *Recollection* of Thought, advert closely to the great Truths of the Gospel, and exclude all wandring and vain Imaginations, and carefully gather up those Notions of Religion which lie scattered in our Minds, and reduce them to some Order and Connexion, and infix them by Meditation still *deeper* in our Souls; and instead of a dry, barren and *common Way*, for all Temptations and Injections of the Devil,

Devil, for numerous and vain and incoherent Phancies, we ſhould by ſerious Attention to thoſe concerning Truths, that we have read or heard, make our Souls (as *Solomon* expreſſes it) *a Garden encloſed, a Spring ſhut up*, and *a Fountain ſealed*: And then no Fear of the Seeds being trodden down or devour'd by the Fowls of the Air; but 'twill remain *rooted* and grounded in our Hearts, and *will bring forth its Fruit in its Seaſon.* Cant. 4. 12.

Secondly, We muſt take care that the Word be not like Seed ſown in *ſtony* and *rocky* Places, where there is no *Deepneſs of Earth*; leſt, it ſpring up too *haſtily*, and when the Sun is hot it be ſcorch'd and wither away becauſe it hath no *Root*. That is, as our Lord interprets it, we muſt be carefull not only to *receive* the Word with Joy, and have an *extempore* ſuperficial Religion, and *believe* and *obey* only for a *while*; but likewiſe to *endure*, and not be offended or diſcouraged though Tribulation or Perſecution ariſe becauſe of the Word, nor to fall away in Time of Temptation.

I doubt there are too many of theſe *Rocky* Hearers, that perhaps are well enough pleas'd to be handſomſely told of their Duty, to hear a well-pen'd Sermon, and for the preſent readily aſſent to the Truth and Reaſonableneſs of what is diſcours'd to them; and believe it their Intereſt to live as becomes Chriſtians, and rejoyce

at the News of being freeed from the Tyranny of the Devil and their own unruly Lusts and Passions, *of being made Children and Heirs of God*, and *Coheirs with Christ of an Eternal Inheritance*, and that there are never-fading Crowns of Glory reserv'd for them in the highest Heavens; and are resolved to set about the Performance of that Duty immediately, which is so excellent in it self and shall be so infinitely rewarded. And indeed, the Christian Religion is so highly reasonable in its own Nature, so conducive to the Comfort and Happiness even of *this* Life, and the sure Way to such endless Bliss hereafter, that it can't but be very pleasing in the *Theory*, to any Man of Sense and Reason.

But after all this, I fear there are too many Hearers, that like *Rocky* Places, have only a *Surface* of good Earth, and retain this good Affection to Religion but for a *while*, and at the Bottom are impenetrable as a Rock, and will not suffer the good Seed to shoot so *deep* into their Hearts, and take so *firm* a Rooting as is necessary to its Fruitfulness and Increase.

Their Spring is quickly over, a *Blade* or a *Stalk* is the fartheſt Progress their Religion makes, and never arrives to the *full Corn in the Ear*; but when they meet with any Difficulty in the Practice of it in it self, or any Opposition to it either *without* from *Men*, or from the Devils Temptations *within*; For want of Deepness

neſs of Earth and Moiſture they fall and wither away. If there were nothing elſe for 'em to do but to *receive* the Promiſes, they would with Joy indeed give ear to the glorious Deſcriptions of the Happineſs of a Chriſtian: Nay, that Happineſs is ſo exceeding great, that *at preſent* they may very well be glad to hear of the *Way* to attain it, and for a ſpurt ſet chearfully about it, and a ſhallow *Cruſt* of Earth will be ſufficient to make ſome Shew and *Appearance* of Fruitfulneſs and Increaſe. But, unleſs the Heart be *throughly* plyable, and there be *Deepneſs* of Earth, an humble Senſe of the great Need we have that this Divine Seed ſhould take Root and grow up in our Souls, and likewiſe the *Moiſture* of a ſincere *Repentance* for our former Barrenneſs and ſtony Hardneſs of Heart, the Word will take but ſhallow Rooting for all our ſuddain Raptures, and upon upon every Difficulty and Temptation be ready to languiſh and wither, eſpecially when the Heats of Perſecution ſtrike upon it; and then, too often, the latter End is worſe than the Beginning, and the Men grow more hardned and inſenſible than ever.

Thoſe therefore that find themſelves of this *rocky* Temper, ſo difficult to be perſwaded to be Chriſtians indeed, ſo ready to look upon the *ſmooth* Side of Religion only, and pleaſe themſelves in the *Theory* of it, admire the *Promiſes* of Chriſtianity,

ty, but find *great Reſiſtance* in their Breaſts when the Word would take *deeper Root*, and they are exhorted to a ſtill more and more excellent and fruitful Piety: Theſe Perſons are by all means to endeavour ſtill more and more to *ſoften* their Hearts, and make them *pliable* to the Impreſſions of the Word of Life; that it may ſink *deep* into their Souls, and be fix'd there beyond the Danger of yeilding to every Temptation, and withering when Adverſity ſhall come. They muſt not boggle at any thing that appears to be their Duty, but be diligent and induſtrious in ridding their Minds of their former Evil Habits and Inclinations, and *inure* themſelves to the Obedience of Chriſt; not pretending Hardſhip or Impoſſibility when *He commands*, not endeavouring to *leſſen* the Obligation of any of his Precepts, or ſhifting it from themſelves, nor expecting Heaven upon eaſier Terms: But, *knowing* their Lord's Will, endeavour to *do* it in Sincerity, upon ſuch Obedience only, through the Merits of Chriſt, hoping for the Promiſes.

And this Courſe, like good *Tillage* and *Manuring* of our Ground, will ſoon mollify the Heart, and make it not only *ſuperficially*, but *intirely Pliable* to the Word of God, receptive of its Impreſſions to the very *Bottom*, ſo that it ſhall *dwell in us richly*, and bring forth Fruit, not only in Times of Security and *Peace*, but even

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then when *Tribulation* ſhall ariſe becauſe of the Word, and take ſtill deeper Root, and bring forth greater Abundance, notwithſtanding all the Storms and Scorchings of Perſecution, or even a *fiery Tryal*.

Thirdly, in order to the Fruitfulneſs of the Word, we muſt be very careful that it be not like Seed that falleth among *Thorns*, leſt the Thorns ſpring up and choak it, ſo that it yield no Fruit. That is, that after the hearing of the Word we go not forth and ſuffer the *Cares* of *this World*, and the Deceitfulneſs of *Riches*, and the *Luſts* and *Pleaſures* of this Life to enter in and choak the Word, and it become utterly *unfruitful*, or at leaſt, bring no Fruit to Perfection.

'Tis by a lamentable Experience, too true, that the Love of *this* World very much hinders our Proviſion for the *next*; and 'tis *as* true, that this is the greateſt *Folly and Madneſs* in Nature, becauſe the *World to come* is upon all Accounts, ſo infinitely to be preferr'd before the *preſent*, that there cannot be the leaſt Competition between them: For, how can a World of *Cares and Vexations, of Miſery and Affliction of all Sorts, of Hazards and Uncertainties, of Sickneſs, Pain and Death*, as *this* is, compare with a World of *eternal, unmix'd and uninterrupted Happineſs*, as is the *other*? And therefore, one would think Men ſhould be ſo *wiſe* and ſo much their *own Friends*, as to beſtow their greateſt Endeavours

deavours in Purſuit of their main Intereſt; and not on the contrary ſuch egregious Fools, as for the Gain of an *empty Bubble* to forfeit an *happy Eternity*.

So far as is conſiſtent with the Care of the *Soul*, 'tis very allowable to mind the Affairs of *this Life*: Nay, 'tis a *Duty* of our Holy Religion for every man to be induſtrious in his Calling, and to enjoy with Thankſgiving the Portion that God hath given him here below: But to *invert* God's Order, and place that Firſt in our Eſteem which ſhould be *Laſt*; when he ſays, ſeek ye *Firſt* the Kingdom of *God* and his *Righteouſneſs*, and then all *needful* things of *this* World ſhall be added unto you, to run quite counter, and *Firſt* provide for Abundance *here*, and *then* (and that but very coldly, God knows) think a little of the *Kingdom of God and his Righteouſneſs*; this is ſuch a prepoſterous Courſe as can never end in any thing but *Shame and Confuſion*.

If it be true, that the Gain of even the *whole World* would be a very unprofitable Exchange when compared with the *Loſs of the Soul*; and if it be true, that the Loſs of the Soul will follow upon the Unfruitfulneſs of the Word of God, for Faith alone will not ſave, but muſt bring forth the Fruits of the Spirit: And finally, if it be true, that a too great Love and eager Proſecution of the things of this World will choak the Word of God; and make

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it unfruitful, as our Lord in this Part of the Parable affirms it will: If all this be true, I ſee not how it can be avoided, but that ſuch as have a Deſire that the Word of God ſhould be fruitful in their Souls in order to the eternal *Salvation* of them, muſt love the World *leſs*, and their Souls *more* muſt be careful in the *Firſt* place to *grow in Grace and be rich towards God*, and clear their Minds of theſe worldly Thorns and Briars, leſt the Divine Life be ſtifled and that Seed choak'd which alone can fructify to a happy Immortality. We muſt *uſe* this World, yet ſo as not to *abuſe* it; but certainly he *abuſes* it and all the Bleſſings that God affords him in it, who ſo immoderately *Doats* upon it, as to prefer it before the Service of his great *Benefactor*, and ſpends moſt of his Thoughts and Endeavours about the encreaſing Wealth, and the Enjoyment of theſe ſublunary Pleaſures, and can ſpare but very little, if any of his Time and Pains, to prepare himſelf for the Enjoyment of God in Glory.

And yet, as plain as this is, Men are generally ſo little affected with it, as not only to neglect Religion as much as ever, and love the World ſtill more and more; but even to plead the *Cares* of the World as an *Excuſe* for their Coolneſs in Religion, and the Unfruitfulneſs of the Word of God in their Souls. We would be oftner at the Sacrament, and more con

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ſtant in at the Prayers of the Church, and in reading and meditating upon the Holy Scriptures, but that the Cares of the World and the Hurry of Buſineſs takes up moſt of our Time and Thoughts. But for God's Sake, let ſuch conſider; is that an *Excuſe*, which is it *ſelf* as great a *Fault* as any? Will God accept ſuch an Excuſe at the Day of Judgment? Has he not plainly forewarn'd us of the Danger of too much worldly Mindedneſs? Has not St. 1 Joh. 2. 15. *John* ſaid plainly, *love not the World nor the things of the World, for whoſo loveth the World the Love of the Father is not in him:* And our Lord as plainly, *ye cannot ſerve God and Mammon?* How ſtrange a Plea then is it for the Neglect of Religion, to ſay we are deeply engag'd in the Perſuit of *this* World's Good!

¶ If we believe we have Souls to be ſaved, methinks we ſhould take care of *them* in the *Firſt* place; and as for *this* World, a *moderate* Induſtry, ſuch as does by no means intrench upon Religion, is all that can be juſtifyed. And what our Lord ſaid to the Scribes and Phariſees about their taking care of leſſer Matters and neglecting the *weighty* things of the Law, ſhould be our Rule in providing for our Families, and providing for our Souls. *Theſe things ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone.* He that provides not for his own Houſe, according to the Meaſures of Neceſſity and Moderation, is worſe than

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an Infidel, 'tis true; but he that provides not for his own *Soul* is ſtill more unnaturaly cruel.

Theſe are the things that our Bleſſed Lord ſays make this Heavenly Seed, the Word of God, *unfruitful*; and therefore thoſe ſhould with the greateſt Care and Application poſſible, be provide d againſt; nothing being of ſo great Importance to us as the Flouriſhing and Encreaſe of the Word of God.

I come now to conſider the laſt Part of this Parable, *viz.* what it is that will make this holy Seed to *thrive* and bring forth plentifully the Fruits of Righteouſneſs; and which Courſe conſequently, it highly concerns us all to take, that we may not be barren under the Means of Inſtruction that we enjoy.

Our Lord expreſſeth it thus: *But, other Seed fell into good Ground, and brought forth Fruit, ſome an Hundred-Fold, ſome Sixty and ſome Thirty.* That is, he that receiv'd Seed into the *good* Ground, is he that having heard the Word *underſtandeth it, and receives and keeps it in an honeſt and good Heart, and brings forth Fruit with Patience according to his Ability, whether Thirty, Sixty or an Hundred-Fold.* In this Part of the Parable there are *Five* things to be conſider'd.

Firſt, That the *good Ground* in which the Seed of the Word will take deep Rooting, and bring forth Plentifully is an honeſt and good Heart.

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Secondly, That that which *infixes* the Seed of the Word in this good Ground, is *Conſideration*, tranſlated *underſtanding the Word.*

Thirdly, That the Seed ſo planted in this good Ground, muſt be diligently *kept* and *preſerved* in it.

Fourthly, That we muſt expect the Encreaſe of it with *Patience*, and take care that the Fruits come to *Perfection*; and

Laſtly. That this Increaſe muſt be proportionable to the *Quantity* of the Seed that is ſown, and to the Strength and Power of the *Soil* in which it is ſown; that is, to every Man's *Ability*, and the Opportunities he has had of Improvement, whether Thirty, Sixty, or an Hundred-Fold.

Firſt, The *good Ground*, in which the Seed of the Word will take deep Rooting and bring forth plentifully, is an *honeſt and good Heart*; that is, a Heart ſincerely deſirous to be *inform'd* in its Duty, and that cordially *propoſes* to *perform* it, and is truly *humble* and of a *modeſt teachable* Temper.

1 Cor. 3, 5, 6. St. *Paul* tell us, that *though he plants and* Apollos *water, yet 'tis God alone that giveth the Increaſe:* Now, can any Man imagin that God will make that effectual to our Good which we deſpiſe and value not, and force thoſe Favours upon us, which we neither now *deſire*, nor if we had them ſhould do other than *neglect*? The Graces of Religion are too precious to be beſtow'd upon ſuch brutiſh Natures, and none but thoſe that have Hearts earneſtly

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deſirous of his Divine Aſſiſtance, that they may be purifyed and renewed by his bleſſed Spirit, and inſtructed in his holy Will that they may know how to pay a more acceptable Service to him; none but thoſe that have ſuch *honeſt* and *good* Hearts can expect the Word ſhould flouriſh and grow fruitful, and they only that thus *hunger and thirſt after Righteouſneſs* ſhall be *filled.*

And this thoſe would do well to conſider, who frequent our religious Aſſemblies in complyance to Cuſtom only, and becauſe their Neighbours do; or to learn new *Modes* and Dreſſes, or to ſhew their *own*; or to while away the Time that lies uſeleſs upon their Hands, or to meet a Friend, or pleaſe their Ears with ſome new Notion, or to gratify their Curioſity, or the like: Let not ſuch Perſons be deceiv'd, God is not mock'd; let not ſuch think they ſhall receive any thing of God but the Fierceneſs of his Diſpleaſure, for their prophaning to ſuch vile Purpoſes what he intends as a Means to their Salvation. Thoſe only ſhall receive *Advantage* by God's Word, that ſincerely and earneſtly deſire its *Nouriſhment that they may grow thereby.*

This *honeſt and good Heart*, is likewiſe *Modeſt* and *Teachable*; and indeed, this Diſpoſition is very neceſſary in order to the Fruitfulneſs of the Word.

For, Pride and Conceitedneſs are naturally the greateſt Hinderers of Improvement in all Sorts of Acquirements whatever; but in Religion they do the moſt Miſchief of all, and are the great Deſtroyers of whatever is religious and good.

For, beſides that a high Opinion of ones own preſent Endowments cuts off all Endeavours of growing better, and renders all ſpiritual Advice *barren* to him that thinks he hath no need of it: Beſides, that *Reproof* frets and inrages one that thinks *Commendations* rather belong to *him*; and Inſtruction, in Caſes of Difficulty, is thrown away upon a Man that thinks himſelf Wiſer than his Teachers: Beſides theſe and ſeveral other *Natural* Ill Conſequences of an over-weening Opinion of ones ſelf, which might be mentioned, there is this yet above all, that it utterly bars and ſhuts out God's holy Spirit; it deprives the Soul of his gracious Influences, and diverts the Streams of his Grace and Benediction from watering our Hearts: For *Pride is an Abomination unto the Lord*, a thing that he hates and deteſts above all things: And St. *James* tells us, that inſtead of *aſſiſting*, God *reſiſts the Proud*, is his profeſs'd Enemy. And no wonder if that Soul be barren, which is thus *curſed of God*, and denyed thoſe refreſhing Dews of his Favour which alone can make it fruitful. Let us therefore lay our Foundation *low* in *Modeſty*, *Sincerity and Humility*, and God will build

Prov. 16. 5.

Jam. 4. 7.

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us up to Life everlaſting. We ſhall then *be like Trees planted* and deep rooted *by the Rivers of Water, that bring forth their Fruit in their Seaſon; our Leaf ſhall not wither, and whatſoever we do it ſhall proſper,* Pſal. 1. 3.

Secondly, that which infixes the Seed of the Word in the good Ground of an honeſt and good Heart, is *Conſideration* and *Meditation*, render'd in our Tranſlation *underſtanding* the Word. The Word in the * Original ſignifies *weighing, pondering* and *conſidering:* And St. *James* ſays agreeably, whoſo *looketh into* the perfect Law of Liberty and continueth therein, that is, as the * Words in the Greek ſignify, has look'd *cloſe* and *dwelt* upon it by ſerious *Meditation*, he being not a forgetful Hearer, but a Doer of the *Work*, this Man ſhall be *bleſſed* in his doing, *Jam.* 1. 25.

* συνιὼν.

* παρακύπτω. παραμένω.

He therefore that deſires the Word ſhould encreaſe and multiply, muſt not only receive it in an honeſt and good Heart, but *infix* it there by ſerious *Conſideration*; and be not like thoſe compar'd to thorny Ground in the Parable, who, having heard the Word, go forth and think no more of it, but ſuffer the Cares and Pleaſures and Riches of the World to enter immediately into their Minds and choak the Word, ſo that it becomes unfruitful: But by after-*Meditation* and *Recollection* of Thought make it ſink ſtill *deeper* into their Souls, and ſtrike a Root to the very *Bottom* of their Hearts.

And indeed, without ſuch *Conſideration*, there can be very little Hope, if any, of its Fruitfulneſs. For, in all Learning, 'tis *Meditation* that gives a Root to what is read or heard, and fixes it deep in the Mind; 'tis that which makes it a Man's *own*, and ſerviceable to him upon occaſion; and *without* it, the moſt accurate Diſcourſe would tickle the Ear only, not inform the Underſtanding; and truly, the more *excellent*, the leſs *Beneficial*, unleſs it be weighed and examined by a ſerious and near Inſpection.

Thus, the Doctrin of Chriſtianity, tho the moſt excellent in it ſelf, as proceeding from the Divine *Word*, the Wiſdom of the Father, is ſeldom embrac'd as ſuch by Perſons of a trifling *unthinking* Spirit, but rather appears harſh and unreaſonable; or at beſt is but faintly approv'd of, and for a ſhort Continuance. For, the Beauties of Holineſs, like other chief Excellencies, are not to be clearly ſeen and *fully* diſcovered by a ſlight and curſory *Glance*, but by a diligent and curious *Search*; like *Gold*, that is not to be found upon the *Surface* of the Earth, but lies further in, and is treaſured up within her *Bowels*. Wherefore, as we tender our Perſeverance in the Faith and our eternal Salvation, we muſt not think our Task is over when we have *heard* the Word, but always ſet ſome time apart (and the ſooner the better) to meditate and lay it to *Heart*, and frequently *revolve*

it

it in our Minds, consider it in all its *Relations* and *Tendencies*, its Nature, and its happy and glorious Effects; and then we shall be intirely satisfyed that 'tis our most *reasonable* Service, and above all things our Interest to practise its Divine Precepts, and that it flourish in our Souls, and bring forth Fruit in Abundance.

Thirdly, This Seed so planted and fixed in this good Ground, must be likewise diligently *kept* and *preserved* in it.

Sloth and Idle Carelessness always have an ill Effect; and many hopeful beginnings are nipp'd and crush'd, and come to very deplorable conclusions, for want of that care and Industry, which was necessary to promote and further them to Perfection.

But above all they are most Dangerous in Religion. For besides that they *Naturally* tend to make Virtue weak and degenerate; they give a fair Occasion to our *great Enemy* to assault us, (that infernal Bird of Prey, who is ready immediately to catch away the good Seed, if unregarded, and throw his wicked Suggestions into their Place) and who is glad to find us thus weak and unarm'd and careless of our Safety; and is too wise not to improve such Opportunities to his best Advantage. And what Hopes, but we shall be shamefully plundered of that Precious Seed which God has sowed in our Hearts that it may spring up to *Immortality*, when we are thus careless and negligent, and

unable to make any great Reſiſtance!

Prov. 4. 23. Therefore the Wiſe Man adviſes to keep the Heart with all *Diligence*; and

1 Pet. 1. 5. St. *Peter*, to give all *Diligence* to add to our Faith Vertue, *&c.* that *ſo* theſe good things may be in us and *abound:* And our

Mat. 13. 25. Lord tells us, in the next Parable to this, that 'twas while Men *ſlept* that the Enemy came and ſow'd Tares. Wherefore,

1 Cor. 15. 34. *awake* to Righteouſneſs, ſays St. *Paul*; be

1 Pet. 5. 8. ſober, be *vigilant*, ſays St. *Peter*, for your Adverſary the Devil goeth about like a roaring Lyon, ſeeking whom he may devour. Let us therefore endeavour, as St.

1 Tim. 6. 2. *Paul* adviſes *Timothy*, to *keep* that which is committed to our Truſt, and to walk *circumſpectly*, not as *Fools but as Wiſe*; *leſt as the Serpent beguiled* Eve *through his Subtilty, ſo our Minds ſhould be corrupted from the Simplicity that is in Chriſt*: We muſt be wiſe as Serpents as well as innocent as Doves; leſt, when the Word has begun to thrive and proſper in our Souls, it be at length rooted out by the Temptations of that old Serpent, and bring no Fruit to Perfection.

Fourthly, we muſt expect the Encreaſe of this good Seed with *Patience* and *Perſeverance*, and take care that the Fruits come to full Maturity.

We muſt expect the Increaſe of this good Seed with *Patience*, becauſe all Improvement is a thing of *Time*: Men can't arrive at Perfection, even in *Vice*, in an *inſtant*,

ſtant, much leſs in *Vertue*. There are many *intermedial* Steps and Advances to it; and as when Seed is ſown there firſt appears but a tender *Blade*, which, in proceſs of Time improves to a *Stalk*, which every day grows taller and ſtronger; and at length appears the *Ear* and the *Grain* in the Ear; and even after that compleat Formation of the Plant, there is yet ſome *conſiderable* Time before it comes to perfect *Ripeneſs*; and all this while the Husbandman waits with Patience till the Time comes of gathering the ripe Fruits of the Earth: So in Religion, there are *gradual Advances* to Perfection. The *Beginnings* of Religion, the firſt Sproutings of this Heavenly Seed are and will be tender and unconfirm'd, but Time will ſtrengthen and improve them; every Day will make ſome Advance to Perfection, where there is an honeſt and good Heart, and Sincerity at the Bottom: But theſe Advances may be very leiſurely, and like the Growth of Plants, ſcarce diſcernable in their *Progreſs*, and yet at length the Word of God brings forth its genuine Fruits in great Abundance. And this, though perhaps ſlow pace in Religion, muſt be born with *Patience* and *Hope*; *for in due Time*, for all this, *we ſhall reap if we faint not.*

And this thoſe ſhould conſider who expect to be *compleat* Chriſtians in an *inſtant*, and are impatient of Delays, and diſheartned by every Rub and Difficulty; and be-

becauſe their Practice can't keep pace with their too forward and paſſionate *Wiſhes* and *Deſires*, are apt to deſpair of ever coming to that *Ripeneſs* of Chriſtianity, which will fit them for their great Maſters Garner; and too often let ſlip what they have already attain'd, and give over in much Dejection after they have made a very hopeful Progreſs. But this is a cunning Artifice of the Devil, and ought, with the greateſt Care imaginable, to be provided againſt; and a Man's beſt Defence in this Caſe is *Patience*, or a calm and reſign'd Expectation of Encreaſe and Bleſſing from God in his due Time, when we have done our own beſt Endeavour; *a waiting God's Leiſure*, a confiding in his Goodneſs who only gives the Encreaſe. And (as St. *James* expreſſes it) *as the Husbandman waiteth for the precious Fruit of the Earth, and hath long Patience for it, untill he receive the early and latter Rain*; ſo ſhould we be alſo patient, and in Patience poſſeſs our Souls and eſtabliſh our Hearts. For there is a *latter* Diſtillation of the Divine Grace as well as that which is *early* and at Firſt; and which, when God pleaſes to afford it, we ſhall then grow up to Perfection: And though ſometimes it may not be ſo plentifully ſhowr'd down as we could wiſh, yet will not be *finally* wanting in a ſufficient Degree, to ſuch as ſincerely embrace it and co-operate with it.

Jam. 5. 7.

And,

And as our Lord expreſſes it in another Parable, *Mark* 4. 26. (which, for its near Reſemblance to this and the next, I think it needleſs Particularly to diſcourſe of) *The Kingdom of God*, or of Grace, *is as if a Man ſhould caſt Seed into the Ground, and ſhould ſleep and riſe, Night and Day, and the Seed ſhould ſpring up and grow he knoweth not how, from the Blade to the Ear, and to the full Corn in the Ear; and when the Fruit is ripe, he putteth in the Sickle becauſe the Harveſt is come.* That is, tho' good Men's Progreſs in Religion often-times be not ſo quick and haſty as they may and wiſh; yet, though almoſt inſenſibly, it may daily grow and increaſe, and at laſt the perfect Fruits of Righteouſneſs be viſible in their Converſations.

Therefore let not a ſlow Improvement diſcourage any Man that is ſincerely deſirous of making ſtill *higher* Advances, but let him hold faſt what he already hath, do his beſt Endeavour ſtill to grow in Grace and the Fruits of the Spirit, and then with Patience wait upon God for a more plentiful Increaſe.

In the laſt place, this Increaſe of the Word muſt be proportionable to the *Quantity* of the Seed that is ſown, and to the *Strength* and Powers of the *Soil* in which it is ſown; that is, it muſt be according to every Man's *Ability*, and the *Opportunities* he hath had of Improvement; in ſome *Thirty*, in ſome *Sixty*, and in ſome an *Hundred-fold*.

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When a Husbandman ſowes his Seed, if he ſowes in great *Plenty* and upon *good* Ground, we know he expects to reap in a *proportionable Abundance*; and when he ſowes more *ſparingly*, and the Soil be not *capable* of ſo *great* an Increaſe, his Expectations are accordingly. And ſo it is in Religion; from ſuch as are of *pregnant* Parts and Abilities, able to entertain and conſider and make the beſt Uſe of the Word of God that is ſown in their Hearts, and likewiſe enjoy the great Bleſſing of excellent Inſtruction, and have the whole of Chriſtianity ſet before them in a true Light, all the Duties and Rewards and Puniſhments of it, ſo that there is all that can be done in order to an abundant Increaſe; from ſuch Men as theſe, God will expect *much* Fruit, even the Increaſe of *an Hundred-Fold*; *they muſt abound* in every good Word and Work; and the Word of God dwelling ſo *richly* in them, Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept, Treaſures of Inſtruction heap'd one upon another, a *ſcanty* penurious *Increaſe* will not be accepted, much leſs a total and intire *Barrenneſs* excus'd. For, ſo St. *Paul*, Heb. 6. 7, 8. *The Earth that drinketh in the Rain that cometh upon it, and bringeth forth Herbs meet for them by whom it is dreſſed, receiveth Bleſſing from God; but that which beareth Thorns and Briars, is rejected, and nigh unto Curſing, whoſe End is to be burn'd.* And our Lord in very plain and expreſs Terms

Terms ſays the ſame, *Luk.* 12. 48. *Unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall much be required*, and *to whom Men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.* But becauſe all Men are not of Abilities alike, nor have the ſame Opportunities of Inſtruction and Improvement; where there is any *Defect* either in the *ſowing* of the *Seed*, or in the *Capacity* of the *Soil*, God will proportionably abate in his Expectations of Increaſe. But, though he will not expect the *ſame Degree* of Increaſe from every Man, yet he will expect *ſome*; if not an *Hundred-Fold*, yet *Sixty*; or if not *Sixty*, yet at leaſt *Thirty*.

And, if this be true, in what a miſerable Condition are Myriads of the Hearers of the Word, who receive the Seed in great Plenty and Abundance, and are able likewiſe to bring forth a conſiderable Increaſe; and yet are as unfruitful as if their Souls had lain always *fallow*, and were never cultivated and impregnated by the Means of Spiritual Inſtruction! Let ſuch be entreated by the Love of God and their own immortal Souls, to look about them, and ſhake off that ſtupid Numneſs and Inſenſibility that ſo fatally beſets them, and bethink themſelves how ſad their Condition will be, when at the great Harveſt, the End of the World, when God will gather the ripe Fruits and diſpoſe them in his heavenly Garner; when at that great Day our Lord ſhall ex-

expect Fruit from the Seed that he hath ſown upon their Hearts, and ſhall find nothing but Briars and Thorns, Wickedneſs and Impurity: Let them bethink themſelves what a ſad Condition they will be in, when their Unfruitfulneſs ſhall be puniſh'd with everlaſting Burnings, and the Number and Sharpneſs of the Torments of Hell increas'd upon them, becauſe when they *knew* their Lord's Will, they did not prepare themſelves to do according to it.

Let them conſider, that though God bears long with them, and frequently importunes them to a more ſerious Reflection upon their Ways, that they would *turn their Feet unto his Teſtimonies*, and be no longer *unprofitable Hearers, but Doers of his Word*; yet it will not be *always* ſo, there will be an End of this Day of Grace and Forbearance, and how ſoon God alone can tell; and perhaps this Diſcourſe may be the laſt Invitation to a new Life, which ſome that hear it may ever have, or at leaſt, the laſt that ſhall be attended with that Divine *Grace* and *Aſſiſtance* which alone can make it *fruitful*. Wherefore, *now while it is call'd to day, harden not your Hearts, leſt God ſhould ſwear in his Wrath, that you ſhall never enter into his Reſt*

Conſider what our Lord ſays upon this Account, in this of *Mat.* 13. 12. *Whoſoever hath, to him ſhall be given, and he ſhall have more Abundance; but whoſoever hath not, from him ſhall be taken away even that which he hath.*

hath. The plain Meaning of which is this, He that hath made good Uſe of the Grace he hath already receiv'd, and the Inſtructions he hath already heard, ſhall receive abundantly more Grace, far greater Aſſiſtances, and much larger and more frequent Showers of the divine Bleſſing than ever formerly he did: Chriſt will come in to him and ſup with him, and he with *him*, as 'tis expreſs'd, *Rev.* 3. 20. that is, will freely communicate to him of his divine Favours and Refreſhments, and there ſhall be mutual Feſtivity and Joy between them; his Saviour will take him into the neareſt Relation to himſelf; for he hath told us, that *whoſoever ſhall do the Will of his Father which is in Heaven, the ſame is his Brother, and Siſter and Mother*; that is, as tenderly regarded by him as thoſe deareſt Relatives.

And, how muſt that Soul thrive and flouriſh which is thus plentifully water'd with Showers above, and enrich'd with Streams iſſuing from the Fountain of Goodneſs! But on the contrary, How intolerable will be his Miſery that neglects and *diſregards* theſe Sermons of the Goſpel, and is not a Doer of the Word, but a careleſs Hearer only, deceiving, ſadly deceiving his own Soul! From him ſhall be taken away even that which he hath; he ſhall be deprived of it to inrich his induſtrious Brother and add to his Abundance. What Grace he had before ſhall be *with-*

drawn,

drawn, and he naked and defenſeleſs, left to the Fury of his Spiritual Enemies; the Dews of Heaven ſhall no longer drop upon his *barren* Soul, but parch'd and ſapleſs it ſhall be reſerv'd to eternal Burnings. Conſider this, all ye that forget God, and are unfruitful under all his Care and fatherly Nurture and Admonition; leſt at length he pluck you away and there be none to deliver you. And remember the Words of *Solomon*, Prov. 29. 1. *He that being often reprov'd ſtill hardeneth his Neck, ſhall ſuddainly be deſtroyed, and that without Remedy.*

And thus have I done with the firſt of our Saviours Parables, in which is ſet before us a Bleſſing and a Curſe; a *Bleſſing*, if when the good Seed is ſown, and we have heard the Word, we receive it into honeſt and good Hearts, and according to our ſeveral Abilities bring forth Fruit to Perfection; that is, obey and Practiſe it with Conſtancy and Perſeverance: And a *Curſe*, if we remain ſtill barren and unfruitful, not Doers of the Word but Hearers only, deceiving our ſelves into eternal Perdition. It becomes us all therefore, to *take heed how we hear*; and not be like the *High-way-ſide*, ſuffering our Thoughts to wander from the Inſtructions we have heard, and leaving the good Seed unregarded to the Mercy of the great Enemy of Souls; and expoſing our Minds as a common Tract to vain and wicked Fancies

and

and Imaginations, and diabolical Suggeſtions; nor like the *ſtony* Ground, impenetrable to any *deep* and laſting Impreſſions of the Word of Life; nor like that overrun with *Thorns* and *Briars* and *noxious Weeds*, ſuch as are the *Cares* and *deceitful Riches* and Pleaſures of this Life, which will choak the Word and render it unfruitful: But, that we treaſure up this Divine Word in our Memories, ponder and conſider it, and ſet our Love and Affections upon it. So ſhall it grow and proſper and bring forth Fruit, in ſome Thirty, in ſome Sixty, in ſome an Hundred-Fold; to the Honour and Glory of God, and the eternal Salvation of our immortal Souls. Which, God of his infinite Mercy grant for Jeſus Chriſt his Sake.

Now, He that miniſtreth Seed to the Sower, both give us this Heavenly Bread for our Food, and multiply the Seed that is ſown, and encreaſe the Fruits of our Righteouſneſs; that being inrich'd in every good thing to all Bountifulneſs, there may be given through us, Thanksgiving unto God. Amen, Amen. 2 Cor. 9. 10.

THE

The PRAYER.

I.

MOST Holy Jesus, thou blessed Author of the best Religion, who hast in great Plenty sown among us the Seed of a happy Immortality, even thy holy Word, and watered it with the Dew of thy heavenly Grace, and art wanting in nothing on thy Part to cause it to flourish and bring forth abundantly the Fruits of Righteousness; I, thy unworthy Servant, unfeignedly bless this thy infinite Goodness and tender Care for the Children of Men, but must with Shame confess, that hitherto thy Care has been in too great Measure defeated by my Inconsiderateness and Obstinacy; my Soul still remains barren as the High-way-side, impenetrable to the Sermons of the Gospel, or at best, flitting and unconstant in religious Purposes, which have been short-liv'd as the Grass that grows upon the Top of the Rocks, or else choak'd with the Briars of worldly Cares and Distractions, with covetous and sensual Desires. Thus have I courted Death in the Error of my Life! But now, being awaken'd by thy Mercy, and become sensible of the Danger I am in, and the sad Consequence if my Barrenness continues, I humbly beg, and earnestly at the Throne of Grace, that Thou, from whom is all our Sufficiency, wouldst aid me with thy

thy bleſſed Spirit, and help my Infirmities, and ſtrengthen me mightily *in* the inner Man, that thy Word may ever hereafter take ſo deep a Rooting in my Soul as to produce the genuine Fruits of Chriſtianity.

II.

I am ſadly ſenſible, O Lord, that the Heart is deceitful above all things, and deſperately wicked, who can know it? Do thou therefore, who art the Searcher of our Spirits, purge my Soul of all lurking Hypocriſy and Pride and Self-conceit, and every thing that will hinder the Growth and Increaſe of this heavenly Seed; and make me apt to receive and cheriſh it, by creating in me an honeſt and good Heart, and renewing a ſincere and right Spirit within me. Grant that I may ſo ſeriouſly attend to, and conſider the great Truths thy Goodneſs hath revealed to us in the Goſpel, as intirely to aſſent to them, and heartily endeavour to conform my Practice to my Belief; and may I always heedfully preſerve thoſe divine Inſtructions, and moving Arguments to a perſevering Piety, which I have learned from thy Word, leſt the infernal Bird of Prey deprive me of the good Seed, and in its room plant deviliſh Affections. And, O that Patience and Hope, and an humble Dependance upon thee for Direction and Defence may be my Support in this my Pilgrimage! That ſo, chearfully running

the Race that is set before me, and thankfully acknowledging the early Influences of thy blessed Spirit in my tender Years, and waiting for the later Distillations of thy Grace, which will bring my Fruit to Perfection, and always endeavouring o proportion my Increase to the Means and Opportunities of it, thy Goodness hath vouchsafed me; I may at last escape the Intolerable Punishment of Unfruitfulness, and having my Fruit unto Holiness, the End may be everlasting Life, through thy Merits and Mercies O blessed Saviour Jesus. Amen.

PARABLE

PARABLE II.

Of the Tares.

Matth. xiii. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30.

Another Parable put Jeſus forth unto them, ſaying, The Kingdom of Heaven is likned unto a Man that ſowed good Seed in his Field:
But, while Men ſlept, his Enemy came and ſowed Tares among the Wheat, and went his way.
But when the Blade was ſprung up, and brought forth Fruit, then appeared the Tares alſo.
So the Servants of the Houſholder came and ſaid unto him, Sir, didſt not thou ſow good Seed in thy Field? From whence then hath it Tares?
He ſaid unto them, an Enemy hath done this. The Servants ſaid unto him, wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?
But he ſaid nay; leſt while ye gather up the Tares, ye root up alſo the Wheat with them.
Let both grow together until the Harveſt; and in the time of Harveſt I will ſay to the Reapers, gather ye together firſt the Tares and bind them in Bundles to burn them: But gather the Wheat into my Barn.

THE Interpretation of this Parable is thus ſet down, Verſ. 37. of this Chapter. *He that ſoweth the good Seed is the Son of Man, the Field is the World, the*

good Seeds are the Children of the Kingdom, but the Tares are the Children of the wicked one; the Enemy that sowed them is the Devil, the Harvest is the End of the World, and the Reapers are the Angels. As therefore, the Tares are gather'd and burnt in the Fire, so shall it be in the End of the World. The Son of Man shall send forth his Angels, and they shall gather out of his Kingdom all things that offend, and them that do Iniquity, and shall cast them into a Furnace of Fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth. Then shall the Righteous shine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

From this Interpretation of this Parable, it appears, that the Design of it is to shew, for the Encouragement of the *sincerely* good, and Terrour of the *Hypocritical*; that though there may be many *wicked* Professors of Christianity, that are Christians only in *Name* and *Out-side*, and who in this World may be confusedly intermix'd among the good, and go *undiscover'd* of *Men*, and *unpunish'd* of *God*; nay, *thrive* and *prosper* here more than the good, and to all outward Appearance, be the *Favorites* of Heaven, whilst the sincerely good undergo many *Afflictions*, and appear to Men to be under God's *Displeasure*: Yet, in the great Harvest that shall be at the End of the World there shall be a Distinction made between the one and the other, the hypocritical shall be separated from the sincere, and the former consign'd to ever-

everlaſting Burnings, and the latter receiv-ed into the Heavenly Regions, the Place prepared for them from the Beginning of the World.

This is the *Deſign* of the Parable. We ſhall now briefly conſider how *aptly* expreſſive it is of this Senſe, and then diſcourſe upon the ſeveral Parts of it.

The planting of the Goſpel in the World in order to the converting Men to Chriſtianity, is compared to the *ſowing of Seed*, becauſe (as was ſaid upon the former Parable) the Goſpel, like *Seed*, is that *Principle* of a future great *Increaſe* of Piety and Holineſs in this World, and of Glory and Happineſs in the next: 'Tis that, which, if ſincerely embrac'd, and its Growth and Progreſs not hindred, will ſpring up to *Glory, Honour and Immortality*: And 'tis ſaid to be like Seed *ſown* or committed to the Furrows, and then left to its own *ſeminal Powers* and the favourable Influences of *Heaven*; becauſe the Goſpel, being *actually planted* in the World, is, as to *particular* Perſons, left to make its Way by its own *Power and Efficacy*, the *Excellency* of its *Precepts*, and its *tranſcendent Rewards and Puniſhments*; together with the conſtant Dews of the *Divine Grace* that attend it; without any more *extraordinary* Means, unleſs upon ſome *extraordinary Occaſion*, to make it take Root and fructify. 'Tis *generally* propos'd to *all*, in its whole *Latitude*; which is the *ſowing*

of it, and then Men are left to their own free Choice, whether they will *embrace* it with its *Promises*, or turn their *Backs* upon it and run the Hazard of its *Threats*, without any *irresistible Force* to the one or the other; only the *small still Voice* of God's Spirit in Men's Hearts, and *Grace* descending like the *gentle Dew*, to soften and incline them to *cherish* this good Seed, which is the leaving the Gospel to its *own seminal Powers*, with only the benign Waterings of the Divine Grace and Blessing.

Our Lord is call'd the *Sower* of the good Seed, because he is the *Author* and first Teacher of this holy Religion; and its Validity to the great Purposes to which it is design'd, depends upon the Merit of his bitter Death and Passion, and the *invigorating* Vertue of his *precious Blood*. For, 'twas upon his satisfying the Divine Justice by his *Death*, that he receiv'd Authority to mark out to us *this* Way to Life and Reconciliation, as the only Principle and Seed of Immortality.

The *World* is call'd the Field where this Seed is sown, because this blessed Religion is *catholick* and *universal*, not confined to any *particular Place* or *People* as the Jewish Religion was, but *whosoever*, of what *Nation* or *People* soever, shall *believe* in Jesus, and *repent*, shall be saved. And agreeably in another Parable (which, for its great Analogy to this, I shall not particularly

ly

ly discourse of) the Gospel, or Kingdom of Christ is represented by a Net cast into the *Sea*; not any particular *Lake* or *River*: And *this* World is stiled the Field, because *this* is the only Place of receiving this Seed and bringing forth the genuine and expected Fruits of it; and he that shall refuse to receive this divine Seed *now* while he continues *here*, or not suffer it to grow and increase and bring forth *Fruit*; shall never have the like Opportunity *again*, but suffer for ever the Punishment threatned to *obstinate Infidelity*, or *barren Unfruitfulness*. *This* World is the only *Field*, *this Life* the only *Seed-time*, and at the End of it comes that one great *Harvest*, which shall consign Men to an *eternal* Condition, either happy or miserable, according to their Barrenness or Fruitfulness, during this Time, and in this Place of Growth and Increase. Mat. 13. 47.

The Children of the Kingdom, or those that are *sincere* Christians, intirely devoted to the Service of their great Master, and have receiv'd the good Seed of the Gospel into *honest* and *good Hearts*, as 'tis express'd in the preceeding Parable: These are themselves likewise compared to *good Seed*, because they have a *substantial* Piety, the *Power* as well as the *Form* and Appearance of Godliness, and bring forth the genuine Fruits of their holy Religion. That divine Seed that was sown in their Hearts, has produced, not only the *Blade* in the

Ear, but the *full Grain* in the Ear; the same Kind of Seed that was *sown*, appears in their Lives and Conversations; the Seed of the *Spirit* brings forth the *Fruits* of the *Spirit*, and the Seed of *Holiness* produces *real* and substantial *Holiness*; so that the *Gospel* is called *good Seed*, as 'tis the first *Principle* of Holiness; and truly *pious Men* are likewise call'd *good Seed*, as the genuine *Product* and *Increase* of that first Principle. The *Gospel* is the good Seed *sown*, and the sincerely *religious* are the good Seed as *springing* from it and being *produc'd* by it.

The Children of the wicked one, or the *hypocritical* Professors of Christianity, are compared to *Tares* or *Cockle*, because they have only a Shew and *Appearance* of Religion as Tares and Cockle have of Corn; but like them, no *Substance* of good Corn, none of the *real Excellencies* of Religion, nothing but *hurtful* and *vicious* Qualities as Tares are said to have; hurtful to *themselves* in the final Consequence, as bringing them to so miserable an End; and hurtful to *others* by their ill Neighbourhood and Converse, as Tares to Wheat; and likewise injurious to the *holy Religion* they profess, as reflecting Dishonour upon it by their scandalous Conversation. Upon all Accounts 'tis *infælix Lolium*, as the Poet calls it; *unhappy* Tares they are, that bring *Dishonour* upon *God*, and *Destruction* upon *themselves* and *others*.

The

The *Devil* is very fitly stiled the *Enemy* that *sows* these Tares, because he is the busy Prompter to Vice and Hypocrisy, and the great Encourager of it, by his sly × artful and wheedling Insinuations and wicked Injections: He is that great Enemy of God and all things heavenly and good; and whose constant Endeavour it is to oppose and weaken the Kingdom of Righteousness, and upon the Ruins of it to establish his infernal Dominion.

The *End of the World* is compared to the *Harvest*, because then is the Time of Gods gathering all Men from off the Face of the Earth, and disposing them according to their Deservings, into a new State of endless Happiness or Misery; as *good Corn* at Harvest, is taken from off the Ground, and carryed away, and laid up in Repositories of Safety; but the Tares and other noxious Weeds sever'd from the rest, and bound up in Bundles to be burnt. And the *Angels* are said to be the *Reapers* at this great Harvest; because 'tis by their Ministry that God will execute his most equal Sentence, whether of Absolution or Condemnation; the *Righteous* shall by them be caught up into the Clouds to meet their Lord in the Air, and like good Corn, be laid up, and that for ever, in God's heavenly Garner, *for they shall ever be with the Lord*: And the wicked and *hypocritical* shall by them be separated from the good, and like vile Tares, be thrown into a *Furnace of Fire*

Fire unquenchable. And thus much in short for the Aptness of this Parable to express the Sense that our Lord conceal'd under it.

I shall now proceed to consider its several Parts: And it will inform us of six things.

First, it will inform us of the *State* of the Christian Church in *this* World; that there will be both good and bad under the general Name of *Christians* (as Tares and Wheat together, go under the Name of one Field of Corn) and that the Two first Planters of this Good and Evil respectively, are *Christ* and the *Devil.*

That there will be both good and bad in this World under the general Name of *Christians*, will be no wonder to any Man that considers how many there are that are Christians by *Custom* and *Education* only, because their Fathers were so before 'em, and in their tender Years procur'd their Reception into that Communion; but, seldom look any further into the *Reasons* and *Inducements* to such Belief, and trouble themselves but very little to be *inform'd* in, much less to *practise* the Duties that are bound upon them by that holy Profession: And for the same Reason would have been Mahometans or Jews had their Parents been so, and educated them in that Way, and therefore are *Christians* by *Chance*, not *Choice.*

And

And this, those would do well to consider who spend the whole Six Days of the Week in drudging for the World from Morning until Night; and then, like tir'd Beasts, when they have fill'd their Bellies, without any further Thoughts, lay them down to rest; and when the Lord's Day comes (which is design'd for the Nourishment and Improvement of their Souls in Piety and Goodness, and their *Instruction* in the Religion they profess to be of) make little better Use of it than their Horses do in the Stable, rest from bodily Labour, and saunter and prate and drink away the Day; but seldom come at the Places of divine Worship and Instruction; and if *they do*, are as little the better for it as if they were absent. Let such consider, before it be too late, whether *this Sort* of Christianity will bring 'em to Heaven or no? Whether their being *baptized* in their *Infancy* will save 'em without any *more to do*? Whether their telling our Lord at the Day of Judgment, that they happen'd to be born in a Country where his holy Religion was profess'd, and of such as call'd themselves Christians, and were by them presented to a Minister of Christ who receiv'd them into the Pale of the Catholick Church, and that they continued to call themselves Christians all their Lives, and now and then came to Church as other Christians did: Let them consider, whether at that great Day such an empty Plea will

will be accepted, when the Judg comes to enquire into what *Obedience* they have paid to his *Commandments?* If it *will* be accepted, why does our Lord say, *not every one that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven?* And why is the *Way* said to be *narrow*, and *the Gate strait that leads to Life, and that few there be that find it?* but, if it will *not* be accepted, as most certainly it will not; Doubtless, it highly concerns such Men to consider more seriously of Religion, than they have done hitherto; unless they think their Souls not worth taking care of, or that the everlasting Pains of *Hell*, are not so *great* as those of *Repentance* and living a *new Life*. And tho' for the Reason assign'd above, it is no Wonder that many ill Men here, go under the common Name of Christians, and that *Title* be all the Christianity they can boast of; yet 'twould be a very great Wonder indeed, if such *empty Tares* as these should be laid up with the *good Wheat*, and get to *Heaven* as much by *Chance* as they became Christians.

Mat. 7.21.

Mat. 7. 14.

Further, 'tis no strange thing to find *ill* Men amongst a Society of *Christians*, because *Men* are *free Agents*; and *Religion* does not *force*, but only by proper Methods *incline* and *perswade*: And those, who in their *Infancy* were devoted to the Service of God, and educated in his Discipline in their

their *tender* Years, may yet, through the Predominancy of their *Lusts* and *vile Affections*, and the *Temptations* of the *wicked* one, together with their own careless *Inadvertency*, be, when grown up, inclined to live at quite another Rate than Christianity allows: And though, for Fashion's sake, they may retain the *Name* of Christians, yet choose to be *indeed* the Servants of their own *Passions*, and of the *Prince of Darkness*.

And therefore, 'tis very unreasonable for the Enemies of Religion to conclude as they do, that because many that *profess* Christianity, live in direct *Contradiction* to it; therefore the whole is a *Cheat*: Because, did they believe what that Religion teaches, to be true; they would not dare to live in such continual *Opposition* to it.

Indeed, this should make all Christians very careful and circumspect in their Conversation, lest they bring so great a Scandal as this upon their holy Religion (remembring our Lord's Words, *Woe be to him, by whom the Offence or Scandal cometh:*) But it will not at all follow, that because some of a Profession live contrary to its Precepts and Doctrin, that therefore the whole is a *Forgery*.

For, *believing* and *doing* are Two very *different* things; and a Man may *habitually* assent to the Truth of a thing, and yet not *actually attend* to it: As a Man may be very well assured that there is a dangerous

gerous *Pit* in his Way, and yet be so taken up with minding other things, as not to *attend* to the Danger, and heedlessly *fall into it*. And so a Man may *habitually* believe that there is a Pit of Bottomless Destruction, which will at length swallow up the incorrigibly wicked; and yet, be so deeply engag'd in the Pleasures and Follies of the World, as not to *attend* to it till 'tis too late.

But, suppose *some* that *call* themselves *Christians*, do *not at all believe* any thing of the Christian Religion; there are innumerable more that *do* believe and live accordingly; and the Harmony of their Belief and Practice, methinks should be a better Argument in the *Affirmative*, than the Infidelity and Debauchery of a few *titular* Christians should be in the *Negative*. And though to a Man that stiles himself a *Christian*, and yet believes not a Word of the Matter, to *him* the Whole of Religion is as nothing, yet certainly it cannot be from thence concluded, that therefore 'tis *really* and indeed a *Fiction*. For, that may be assuredly *true*, and that to their *Cost*, which some Men *don't care* to *believe*.

Thus we see 'tis no strange thing that there should be both good and bad that go under the general Name of *Christians* in *this* World; and that though some are much scandaliz'd at it, and raise an Objection from it against the Truth of the Religion, yet there is no Reason so to do; for, 'tis not the

the *Name* that makes a *Chriſtian*; he only is a Chriſtian *indeed*, that to a *right Belief* adjoins *good Works*.

The firſt *Planters* of the good Seed or the Tares, the bad or good Profeſſors of Chriſtianity reſpectively, are *Chriſt* and the *Devil*. *Chriſt*, by teaching a holy Religion to the World, ſuch as ſhall conduct Men to Glory and Immortality, and by the good Motions and Inſpirations of his holy Spirit, inclining 'em to imbrace it, does endeavour to make all Men *happy*, to deliver 'em from the Miſeries of *this* World, (for if *Sin* were weeded out of it, there would be no *Miſery* in it) and to prepare 'em for the eternal and ineffable Felicities of the Kingdom of Glory; in which, after a perſevering Righteouſneſs here, they ſhall be actually inſtated. The Devil, on the contrary, that great Enemy both to God and Man, makes it *his* great Endeavour, by all Sorts of Wiles and Stratagems, to *obliterate* the divine Impreſſions of this holy Religion upon Mens Souls, to divert 'em from *attending* to its great Beauty and Excellency, and the Nature and Duration of its Rewards and Puniſhments; to perſwade 'em that *here* lies the only Scene of Happineſs, and that a *future* Felicity or Miſery is only fit to amuſe and frighten Children withall; that the Deſires of the Body are given us that we might gratify them to the *full*, and that to *deny* and *mortify our ſelves*, is the

moſt

most unnatural Cruelty in the World; that we must make our selves happy, while we have *Opportunity*, and not trust too much to uncertain Reversions: And, when he can't *wholly blot out* the Belief of another World, then he endeavours to *corrupt* it, by perswading us that a very little Religion will serve turn, seeing we have to do with so *merciful* a God.

And, if by these Means or the like, of which he has great Variety, he can incline Men, if not intirely to *apostatize* from Christianity, yet, like *Tares*, to rest satisfyed with the Name and *Appearance* of Christians, and live at loose and random, and follow the Stream of their own Passions and Desires, and his sly Insinuations and tempting Delusions; then he has his End, and will at length cheat 'em of the Happiness that Christ design'd 'em, and decoy 'em into his own Possession, and so bring them to the Portion of Tares and noxious Weeds, that *Furnace of Fire prepar'd for himself and his Angels.*

And therefore, as we tender our eternal Welfare, we must be very watchful and observant, that we may discover the sly Insinuations of this our great Enemy. Whatever would disparage Religion, or lessen the Obligation to a good Life, comes certainly from that infernal Tempter. The Temptations to an excessive Gratification of our bodily Appetites, assuredly come from *him*; the *Opportunities* of *Vice* are

of his diſpoſing, and 'tis he that ingages us in ſo great a Love and earneſt Perſuit of the *World*. And therefore every thing of this Nature muſt be rejected with the greateſt Abomination, as the Endeavours of our great Enemy, to deprive us of our Happineſs, and involve us in his own Ruin

And, on the contrary, thoſe bleſſed Motions that we all of us often feel to a more pious and holy Converſation, muſt be thankfully embrac'd, and chearfully follow'd, as the Directions and Excitations of our dear Saviour, to what is conducive to our eternal Happineſs. They are thoſe heavenly Dews which will refreſh our Souls, and improve their Growth and Increaſe in Holineſs; and if ſincerely co-operated with, will at length bring the Fruits of our holy Religion to Perfection.

And thus much for the firſt thing this Parable informs us of, namely, That the State of the Goſpel in *this* World is ſuch, that there will be both bad and good under the general Name of Chriſtians (as good Corn and Weeds together go under the Name of one Field of Corn) and that the firſt Planters of this Good and Evil reſpectively, are Chriſt and the Devil; together with the Improvement of each Conſideration to the Intereſt of Religion.

But, before I quite leave this Particular, I ſhall, from what has been ſaid of the promiſcuous Mixture of bad and good Men in the Chriſtian Church, and God's ſuffering it to be ſo without any extraordinary Diſcrimination; From this I ſhall obſerve how unreaſonable 'tis for ſome to object, as too many do, againſt the Reception of the Lord's Supper in our Church, becauſe, as they ſay, we admit any that will come, even thoſe that have been ſcandalous Livers, and by that Means the Solemnity is prophan'd and made leſs beneficial to the *good*.

But now, *ſuppoſing*, though not *granting* that we admit any that will come, though Men of ill Lives, (I ſay, not *granting* this, for the thing is evidently falſe, as appears from the *Exhortations* to the Communicants before, and at the Solemnity, and from the *Rubric* of that Office: And from the 26, 27, and 28th *Cannons* of our Church, in which Miniſters are expreſly forbidden to admit *notorious Offenders*, *Schiſmaticks* and *Strangers* to the Communion.) But ſuppoſing this, which is ſo evidently *falſe* as to the *Church*, to be *true* as to ſome *particular Miniſters*; why muſt communicating with ſuch Miniſters, and, as we think, in ſuch prophane Company, be unchriſtianly abſtain'd from, and the Miniſters declaim'd againſt with ſo much Bitterneſs? At this rate they may as well deſert the Communion of the *whole* Church of Chriſt,

and

and refuſe to join in *any* part of divine Worſhip; for no Doubt but ill Men are intermxi'd in *all*, though they may not be *diſcover'd*; and if their Company will unhallow and make ineffectual *one* Duty of Chriſtianity, I can't ſee why it ſhould not do the like to all the reſt. And, if a Separation were admitted upon ſuch Accounts as theſe, there would be no ſuch thing as an *external Communion of Saints*, becauſe, ſuch is the State of the Goſpel in this World, that the bad will be intermixed with the Good, as Tares are in a Field of Wheat.

And as to the Practice of particular Miniſters, I charitably hope none do admit of *notorious* Offenders to the Communion, without receiving ſatisfactory Marks of their *Repentance*, or at leaſt by previous Diſcourſe or writing: When they know of their Intention to communicate, let 'em know the great Danger of receiving unworthily, and urge them to an immediate ſincere Repentance, or elſe forbid 'em at their Peril to approach the holy Table. And if after all this they will come, we are to ſuppoſe in Charity, that they have *repented*, except we are ſure to the contrary.

And, if a Miniſter ſees one at the Table, whoſe Life has, in many Inſtances, to his Knowledg, been very faulty, unleſs the Crimes have been very *great* and very *notorious*; to reject ſuch an one, I think, (with

Submission) would be arrogant and uncharitable, and might exasperate the Man to so high a Degree, as to make him throw off *all* Regard to Religion for the future; and in such a Case the Exhortation appointed to be read at the Time of celebrating those Holy Mysteries, should, one would think, be Warning sufficient for such an one, if *unrepentant*, to *withdraw*; and if he *stays*, Charity would incline one to believe that he was *penitent*. And, if a Person kneeling by, who, perhaps knows much more of the Man's Course of Life than the Minister, shall be offended at his communicating one that receives so *unworthily*, and speak hard things of him, and abstain from that blessed Ordinance upon this Account for the future, as prophan'd by such mix'd Company at it; this is highly unreasonable, uncharitable and unnatural. 'Tis *unreasonable* with Relation to their hard Thoughts and Censures of the Minister, because *Charity* obliges *him* to think *well* of such as present themselves at the *holy Table*, unless there be great and undeniable *Evidence* of their *obstinate* and *continu'd* Wickedness; and in such a Case I dare say no pious Minister would prostitute those holy Symbols to such Swine: And, where there is not such Evidence, Ministers can search Mens *Hearts* no more than other Men, and therefore must hope the *best*, and judge according to the *outward Appearance*; and should they communicate

nicate ſome that receive *unworthily*, by this Means (as 'tis to be fear'd they too often do) why ſhould they be blam'd for that which 'tis impoſſible for 'em to help; and *aſpers'd*, and all further Communion with them deſerted, for ſuffering that *ignorantly*, which *God*, though the *Searcher of all Hearts*, permits in his Church without any open Diſcrimination; namely, the bad to join in all holy Offices with the good? And this Practice is as *uncharitable* as 'tis unreaſonable, becauſe 'tis judging and condemning thoſe as Reprobates obſtinate, unrepenting Sinners, whoſe *Hearts* we cannot ſee; and who, though formerly egregiouſly wicked, yet now, through the mighty Efficacy of God's converting Grace, may, for ought we know, to the contrary, be better than our ſelves. And, 'tis an *unnatural* Practice too, becauſe 'tis the depriving our ſelves of the *Comforts* that attend the Reception of that holy Sacrament, and thoſe of *Union* and *brotherly Love*, meerly upon a *groundleſs Nicety*.

Let us all rather learn not to judge others before the Time, but leave every Man to ſtand or fall by the unerring Judgment of our great Maſter at the laſt Day; leſt by judging others we condemn our ſelves who do the ſame things, and it may be worſe. And, inſtead of abſtaining from the Sacrament, becauſe ſome come and are admitted to it, whom we think, and it may be not without Reaſon, are not

ſo well prepar'd as they ſhould be; endeavour to make our *ſelves* ſtill more and more fit for ſo holy an Ordinance by a daily Amendment of Life; and then *our Fleece*, like that of *Gideon*, ſhall be *moiſtned*, tho' *other* Men's be *dry*. The Apoſtles were never the *leſs* dear to our Saviour for *Judas* his being amongſt 'em, but the *more* ſo rather; and though, through the Wickedneſs that was in his Heart, Satan enter'd into him after he had receiv'd the Sop our Lord gave him at the Celebration of the Paſſover, and in all Probability did partake of what he conſecrated in Memory of his ſucceeding Death and Sufferings; yet the reſt receiv'd miraculous Aſſiſtances of the holy Ghoſt, and were faithful to the Death, and for certain have receiv'd the Crown of Life. And I hope this will ſatisfy for the future, ſuch as upon this Account have abſtain'd from the bleſſed Sacrament, and cenſur'd the *Miniſters* of our Church, and (though without all Reaſon) our *Church it ſelf*: And as what has been ſaid upon this Matter, has been no *impertinent* Digreſſion, ſo I hope it may be a *beneficial* one.

Let us now proceed to the *ſecond* thing this Parable informs us of, namely, The *Time when* God's and our great Enemy the Devil ſowes his Tares among the Wheat, and that is while Men *ſleep*. For ſo the Parable, *while Men ſlept the Enemy came and ſow'd Tares among the Wheat and went his*

his Way. Then is the Time of his injecting his wicked Inſinuations into Men's Hearts, whereby to make 'em become like *empty Tares*, Chriſtians in Name and *Appearance* only, but devoid of the *ſubſtantial Graces* and Vertues of that holy Profeſſion,

By Men's *ſleeping* is here meant a careleſs *Inadvertency* and Neglect of the things of *Religion*; a ſtupid Security in a *thoughtleſs* Way of Life. And this is a Metaphor which the ſacred Writers have often made uſe of to this Purpoſe; and 'tis ſo expreſſive of what they would repreſent by it, that 'twill be worth our while briefly to conſider, wherein the Likeneſs of ſuch thoughtleſs Inadvertency in religious Matters to *ſleep*, does conſiſt.

It is like it, in the firſt Place in its *Cauſe*: For, as Toil and *Labour* and any thing that brings *Wearineſs* and conſumes the Spirits, diſpoſes the *Body* to *Sleep*, and makes it deſire Reſt and Eaſe that it may have a *Recruit*; ſo this *moral* Drowſineſs or Hebetude of the *Soul*, generally begins to creep upon Men, when they find *difficulty* in Religion; a little ſtriving ſoon puts 'em out of Heart, their Hands fall, their Knees grow feeble, their Soul *faints* within 'em, all Hope of Victory is then laid aſide, and they ſit them down as Men quite ſpent, and *then* ſteals that *deep Sleep* upon them which too often ends in *Death*.

Thus we often ſee Men ſet very briskly upon the Practice of Religion at *Firſt*,

and ſeem wondrouſly pleas'd with their new Choice, and admire at their Stupidity that they did not *ſooner* diſcover the tranſcendent Beauties of Holineſs, and are reſolv'd to *redeem* their miſ-ſpent Time, and talk of nothing but Raptures, and of reaching great *Hights* and *Eminencies* of Piety; when all on the ſuddain they are at a *Stand*, there's a *Lyon* in the Way, a *right Hand* muſt be *cut off*, or a right *Eye* put out, *i. e.* ſome *Favourite* Vice muſt be caſhier'd if they move any *further*, and that's a *hard* Saying, and the Men begin to *cool*, a *Stifneſs* ſeizes their over-heated Limbs, and a ſenſeleſs Torpor invades every Part of 'em; and like the young Man in the Goſpel, whom our Lord began to love for his diſcreet Anſwers and towardly Diſpoſition, when they muſt part with their *Riches* to the *Poor*, and *deny* themſelves, their corrupt Deſires and Inclinations, and take up their *Croſs* and follow their Saviour: Then they become *ſad*, and with Grief and *Diſſatisfaction leave* him, and fold their Hands, and return again to their *Dream of Vanity*. Juſt like thoſe in the former Parable, compar'd to *ſtony Ground*, who receiv'd the Word at firſt with *Joy*, but having not ſufficient Deepneſs of Earth, *i.e.* for want of through Conſideration, and beholding the *ſmooth* Side of Religion only, endure but for a *while*, and in Time of Temptation and Difficulty, fall away, and their forward Piety becomes dry and wither'd. Or like

Mark 10. 21.

like thoſe mention'd in another Parable, *Luke* 14. 28. (which was ſpoken upon this very Account, and which, for its great Affinity with this Part of the Parable we are now upon, I ſhall not particularly diſcourſe of) who *begin to build, and ſit not down firſt and count the Coſt whether they be able to finiſh*, and ſo proceeding no further than *Foundation* become the Scorn of all Men. But,

Secondly, as a State of careleſs Inadvertency to the things of Religion, is like *Sleep* in its *Cauſe* and *Beginning*; ſo likewiſe is it, in its Progreſs and Effects. For, like *Sleep*, it *locks* up all the Powers and Faculties of the Soul, and *ſuſpends* their *Action*; it *dulls* its *Apprehenſion*, and makes it take Evil for Good, and Good for Evil; it *vitiates* its *Reaſoning*, and makes it draw falſe and fantaſtick Conſequences and Concluſions; and therefore *corrupts* its *Will* and *Affections*, and makes its *Choices* ſtrangely *fooliſh* and *ridiculous*, ſuch as preferring *Earth* before *Heaven*, a *little Eaſe* and *imperfect Pleaſure* here, before *Rivers* of *ineffable Pleaſures* that are at *God's right Hand for evermore*; and the like. The *lower* Life is in this Caſe *predomimant*, and wild *Dreams* and incoherent Fancies, make up ſuch Men's Divinity, and their Rule of Life and Manners. In ſhort, the Life of ſuch Men is but a *Dream*; their *Notions*, like thoſe of Men in a Slumber, dark, hovering and uncertain; their *Diſcourſe* about *religious* Matters, broken, disjointed unconcluding, full

of

of Fallacies and dangerous Sophiſtry, to cheat themſelves of all *Expectation* here and *Enjoyment* hereafter of what is their greateſt, nay, their *only Happineſs*. Their Actions are like thoſe done in a *Dream* too, extravagant, brutiſh, and unaccountable; ſtartled at *Chimæra's* and the *Shadows* of Danger, and *inſenſible* of the Approaches of *real* and *ſubſtantial* Misery, though juſt ready to overtake them; *fond* of a Bundle of *Feathers*, in *love* with an *aery Nothing*, whilſt their *true* Intereſt is not in all their Thoughts. And, to *compleat* the Parallel, they are as deaf to all *Reproofs* as Men aſleep; as little affected with good Inſtruction and Advice, and ſo bewitch'd with the Fanci'd *Sweetneſs* of their Slumber, that they are as *loath* to be *awaken'd*: And when by *rudeer* Applications they *are*, like Men that have taken too large a Doſe of Opium, they are preſently o'ercome with Heavineſs, and ſhut their Eyes againſt all Conviction and fall aſleep again. And the final Event is this; that as *natural* Drowſineſs cloaths a Man with *Raggs*, ſo the *moral* will cloath him with *Shame and utter Confuſion.*

And now, from this ſhort Parallel which I have drawn between the Sleep of the Soul and the Body; as we may ſee the Fitneſs of the Expreſſion in the Parable, ſo we may learn what Guard to keep upon our ſelves to prevent our infernal Enemies ſowing his *Tares*, or making *us* become as ſuch, by his wicked Inſinuations

and

and Suggeſtions. 'Tis while Men thus *ſleep*, are thus thoughtleſs and inadvertent to Religion, and taken up with the Gaieties and Pleaſures of this World, which, like pleaſant Dreams, entertain the *Fancy* and *Imagination* with much Delight, but ſoon vaniſh and become utterly unprofitable; *then* it is that this ſubtle Enemy makes uſe of his Opportunity, and unobſerv'd, *ſteals* in his wicked Injections, which divert the Soul ſtill *more* and *more* from attending to her main Intereſt, and promote this ſpiritual Slumber ſo long, 'till too often it becomes chronical and habitual, and an utter Oblivion of all religious Obligations, an incurable Numneſs and Stupidity of Soul, God knows, too often follows; and Men become like *Tares*, empty of all ſubſtantial Goodneſs, and at beſt but Chriſtians in Name and Shew, and fit for nothing, but when God ſhall ſee fit, to be gathered up from among the Wheat and burnt.

Wherefore it highly concerns all thoſe that hope to be *ſav'd*, *not to ſleep as do others, but to watch and be ſober; to awake to Righteouſneſs, and walk circumſpectly, not as Fools* diverted by every Feather and gay Appearance, but, as Men that are wiſe to Salvation, always in a Poſture of Watchfulneſs and Defence. Fixing our Attention upon our Duty and the exceeding great Reward of it, and often reflecting upon that intolerable Miſery, which will certainly be the Conſequence of ſuch

fatal

fatal Slumberings, and ſtill preſſing *on* with greater Courage as the Difficulties of Religion increaſe upon us; and daily endeavouring ſtill more and more to ſhake off dead Stupidity to Religion which ſo eaſily beſets us, and to rouze up the Faculties and employ 'em upon thoſe nobleſt of Objects, patiently receiving Inſtruction and Reproof; rejecting every Notion and Opinion that would deſtroy the Neceſſity of a good Life, and ſtudiouſly avoiding *Idleneſs* and *Sloth*; and, according to our Lord's moſt excellent Advice, adding *Prayer* to *Watchfulneſs*, that *we enter not into Temptation.*

This Courſe if we take, we ſhall defeat this generally prevailing Stratagem of the ſubtle Tempter; and being always in a Readineſs to reſiſt him, make him fly from us with Shame and Diſappointment. And our Souls will then grow more and more *ſubſtantial* in Piety, and abound in it as the good Corn; and at length, being grown ripe for the Glories and Felicities of Heaven, be gather'd in Peace, and laid up in Repoſitories of eternal Reſt and Safety, as in the bleſſed *Garner of our Lord.*

Thirdly, this Parable informs us of the Time of *Diſcovery* of the Tares, the *hypocritical* Religioniſts; namely, the Time of *bringing forth Fruit:* When the Blade was *ſprung* up and brought forth *Fruit*, or when the *Grain* appear'd in the Ear, *then* appear'd the Tares alſo. *Then* appear'd the Difference between the *good Corn* and the *Cockle*,

Cockle, which at firſt coming up look'd as flouriſhing and promis'd as fair as the good Corn; but when the Time drew nigh that the *Corn* ſhould appear and come to Ripeneſs and Perfection, then there was a manifeſt Diſparity, and what appear'd ſo well at firſt was then found to be an *empty noxious Weed.* And thus it is too often in Religion.

Many Men make a fair Shew and *Semblance* of Piety; attend the Place of divine Worſhip, with much ſeeming Seriouſneſs and Devotion; and to all outward Appearance, liſten to the Sermons of the Goſpel, and beg the divine Aid (as that Dew of Heaven, which alone can make 'em fruitful) as earneſtly as others do: And this *looks* very well, and is (as far as Men or Angels can diſcern for the preſent) as hopeful a Beginning as need be deſir'd. The *really* good Seed can ſend forth nothing more promiſing at firſt; and hitherto the Tares grow *undiſcover'd* among the Wheat, by any Eye but that of God.

But after this firſt *Blade* has appear'd, and that for ſome conſiderable Time; after they have begun to make this *Shew* of Religion; inſtead of advancing further and further to *Perfection*, as the good Seed does, and abounding in every good Work like the full Grain in the Ear; theſe have nothing but a *Blade* and *Stalk* of Religion, no *Fruit* appears, there is no no *real ſubſtantial Vertue* attends this *Shew* of Piety, but

but rather the Works of the *Fleſh* are diſcernable in their Lives and Converſations. And this is a plain Diſcovery to themſelves and others, that they are but *formal*, not *ſincere* Chriſtians; vile unhappy *Tares*, but not *good Seed*; *for every Tree is known by its Fruits.*

Wherefore, let no Man flatter himſelf with vain Hopes from a formal *cuſtomary* Religion, when there are no real *Fruits* of *Righteouſneſs*, but on the contrary, much Wickedneſs and Folly and Vanity; for, unleſs his Religion makes him *grow* in *Grace* and Vertue, and is ſeen in *all* his Converſation, 'twill be to no purpoſe to make an hypocritical Shew of it at Church; and is no better than the moſt provoking *Mockery* of God, and an unnatural *ſtarving* of the Soul with ſuch *fantaſtick* Food, and will conſign to the loweſt Hell, which is the Portion of Hypocrites.

And as a hypocritical Religion will have a very ſad Conſequence in the *other* World, ſo it expoſes Men to much *Shame* and *Contempt* in *this*. For every Man that ſees ſuch great Shews of Religion, ſuch Pretences to Chriſtian Vertue, will naturally expect to find the Man *all of a Piece*, and that to his *Devotion* and Shew of *Godlineſs* at *Church*, be added *Sobriety* and *Righteouſneſs* in his Converſation and Intercourſe with Men. As when Men ſee the firſt Sproutings and Flouriſhing of a Field that was ſown with good Grain, they expect

to

to find Increaſe of the ſame good Fruits. But, when after all this fair and florid Shew of Piety and Goodneſs, there appears nothing but *Tares*, and the Man is over-run with wicked Habits and vile Affections, little or no Sign of a real *Senſe* of Religion upon his Mind, but rather the hidden Works of *Diſhoneſty* in his Dealings; *Lying and Colluſion* inſtead of *Sincerity and Truth*; Lewdneſs and Intemperance, Pride and Malice, inſtead of Purity both of Fleſh and Spirit: When ſuch *Vileneſs* as this treads upon the Heels of a Mans Shew of Religion, any Man may diſcern that he is a *chriſtian Phariſee*, like a whited Sepulchre, beautiful *without*, but *within* full of Rottenneſs and all Uncleanneſs; that his Religion is *confin'd* to the *Church*, whither he goes ſometimes for Faſhion's Sake to *viſit* it, but always leaves it there *behind* him, and will not be troubl'd with its Company *abroad*.

Now, ſuch Hypocriſy as this, is certainly one of the moſt *hateful* things in the World, and inſtead of gaining *Reputation* to a Man, is the ready Way to make him a *common Scorn*: Men can't but *diſcover* the abominable Cheat, and they can't but *hate* and *deteſt* it. Tares *will* at length appear to be Tares, and the ſooner for being among the good Corn. 'Tis therefore certainly the greateſt Folly in the World, to pretend to conceal under a fair Appearance, what will in a very ſhort Time diſcover

cover it *ſelf*, and will bring a Man to nothing but Shame and Hatred in this World, and the Flames of Hell in the next. And it concerns every Man that deſires to be happy either here or hereafter, to lay aſide all *Guile* and *Hypocriſy* in Religion, and ſincerely endeavour after the *Power* of Godlineſs as well as put on the *Form* and Appearance of it. And thus much for the third Part of this Parable, *viz. when the Blade was ſprung up and brought forth Fruit, then appear'd the Tares alſo.*

The next thing it informs us of, is the holy *Angels* Obſervation of the Actions of Men, eſpecially of *Chriſtians*, and their Diligence and Watchfulneſs in doing God Service, and Zeal for his Glory: For thus 'tis ſaid, *the Servants of the Houſholder*, that is, the *Angels*, as 'tis in the Interpretation, *came and ſaid unto him, Sir, didſt thou not ſow good Seed in thy Field? From whence then hath it Tares? He ſaid an Enemy hath done this.* They anſwer'd, *wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?* They obſerv'd by the looſe Lives of ſome Profeſſors that there were very ill Men that went under the Notion of Chriſtians; which they knew would reflect *Diſhonour* upon *Chriſt* the great Planter of that holy Religion, and would be injurious to the *Progreſs* of the Goſpel; and therefore they haſte to tell him that they may have his further Commands, and with *Zeal* for his *Glory*, and Intentions of great *Charity* to us poor *Mortals*,

tals, they offer their beſt Endeavours to rid the Church of thoſe ſcandalous hypocritical Members.

That the bleſſed *Angels*, are, by God's Appointment, Obſervers, and that for excellent Purpoſes, of the Lives and Actions of Mankind, eſpecially of *Chriſtians*; is evident, not only from this Part of this Parable, but from many other Places of Scripture, as an attentive Reader of the holy Writings muſt often have obſerv'd: Of which, ſome few of the new Teſtament only that give moſt Light to this Matter, I ſhall at preſent mention. St. *Paul*, in 1 *Cor.* 11. 10. giving Directions for the more decent Service of God in the Church; for this Reaſon ſays he, according to the Cuſtom of that Time, ought Women to be *veil'd* or *cover'd* (as the true Senſe of the Place is) in their publick religious Aſſemblies, becauſe of *the Angels*: That is, leſt any thing indecent ſhould be obſerv'd by thoſe pure Spirits, who are preſent as God's *Spies* upon the Actions of Men. The laſt Verſe of the 1ſt. Chapter to the *Hebrews* is likewiſe very plain to this Purpoſe, where the Apoſtle, ſpeaking of the *Angels*, *Are they not all* ſays he, (as aſſur'd of the Truth of what he ſaid) *Are they not all miniſtring Spirits, ſent forth to miniſter to them who ſhall be Heirs of Salvation?* That is, to take notice of their Behaviour in the World, in order to prevent their running into Courſes ruinous, and to ſhield 'em from

the miſchievous Aſſaults of wicked Spirits. And, to mention but one Place more, St. *Paul* charges *Timothy*, 1 Tim. 5. 21. *Before, or as in the Preſence of God and of Jeſus Chriſt, and of the elect Angels*, that he would obſerve thoſe things he had taught him without Prejudice or Partiality: Which plainly ſuppoſes that there were *Angels* then preſent, as Obſervers and Witneſſes of what they were doing and diſcourſing.

It being then thus plain from Scripture, that the *bleſſed Angels* are Obſervers of Mens Lives and Actions, eſpecially of thoſe of *Chriſtians*, as by God's Appointment, and as Miniſters of his divine Government; I ſhall not trouble my ſelf to make curious Enquiries into the Reaſons *why* God appoints *Angels* to obſerve and miniſter to us, ſince nothing eſcapes his *own all-ſeeing Eye*, and his *own all-mighty Arm* can do whatſoever he pleaſes in Heaven and in Earth, in the Sea and in all deep Places? Nor of what Rank and *Order* thoſe Angels are, and how *many*, that are thus employ'd? And whether every Man has a *particular* Angel aſſign'd him, as his Guardian and the Inſpector of his Actions? Which things are too *high* for us *Mortals*, we cannot attain unto them: But ſhall make this good Uſe of this Particular relating to our Practice; That ſince we are under the Inſpection of ſuch *pure* and *holy* Spirits, and whoſe Concern for our Happineſs is very great; ſince they are Witneſſes of our moſt

ſecret

secret Actions, and though *invisible* and unobserv'd *themselves*, are *our curious* Observers: Methinks, we that are our selves but in *one Rank* of Being *below* 'em *here*, and shall hereafter be *equal* to them, should not endure to be found by 'em wallowing like *Swine* in the *Filth* of *Sin*, *degrading* our selves to a Level with the *Beasts* that perish, and in base Hypocrisy *pretending* to be *Christians*, when indeed we act like *Infidels*: Nay, too often, like *Devils incarnate*. How do those good Spirits, tho' they may *pity* our *deplorable* Condition, yet withal, *despise* and *abominate* the servile *Baseness* of such *excellent* Natures! Who, notwithstanding they have such glorious *Hopes*, yet quit their *heavenly Reversion*, for the low Enjoyments of this *contemptible Earth*! Methinks *Shame* should deter us from vile and impious Actions, if nothing else; and the Thoughts of the Dignity of our Nature, not suffer us to act so much *beneath* our selves; and a Man not *brutishly impudent*, should not endure to expose himself to the Observation of an *Angel* in such *vile* Circumstances, as he would be loath to be found in by any *Man* he reverences and respects, nay, by a Servant or a Child.

And as the Angels are *Observers* of Human Actions, so are they God's Intelligencers to give him account of them; not that God *needs* such Information, for every thing lies naked and open to his own *all-seeing*

Eye, but for the greater Order and *Decorum* of his Government. And this their Office, they perform with great *Diligence* and *Watchfulness*, and ardent *Zeal* for his *Glory*; for no sooner were the *Tares* discerned by 'em to be among the good Corn, the formal empty Christians to be intermix'd with the sincerely good, but they hasten to give account of it to their great Master, and, as not being able to indure the great Dishonour reflected upon God and the purest of Religions, by their base Hypocrisy and impious Conversation, they offer, with his Permission, to remove those evil Doers, those not only *unprofitable*, but *wicked* Servants, as unworthy to continue any longer in so *sacred* a Society as that of *Christians*. *Wilt thou that we gather them up?* say they; wilt thou permit us to *weed* this thy great Field of those noxious Tares, to cull out the *empty nominal* Christians, and exert that Power thou hast given us, to their deserved Ruin; that the Residue of thy Servants may see it and fear, and keep from their Abominations? And that those blessed Spirits, that angelick Host, is able to *perform* this Service, no Man can doubt that remembers how *one* Angel in *one* Night destroy'd all the First-born in *Ægypt*.

Now this *their* Diligence and Watchfulness in the Service of God, and Zeal for his Glory, should put *us* upon a holy *Emulation* of doing *God's Will on Earth, as it*

is

is done in Heaven: That is, that we, who here on Earth, are but a *little lower* than the Angels, and ſhall in Heaven be *equal* to them; ſhould now endeavour to be as like them as we *can*, and with the utmoſt Chearfulneſs, Alacrity and Diligence, perform the Duty our great Governour has ſet us; and with a prudent Zeal endeavour in our ſeveral Stations, by *diſcountenancing* Vice, and *encouraging* and promoting *Vertue* to the utmoſt of our Power, to advance the Glory of God, and the Intereſt and Reputation of our holy Religion. If *Magiſtrates* would take due Notice of thoſe that live ſcandalouſly and wickedly, and not bear the Sword in *vain*, but be, as they ought to be, a *Terrour* to *Evil-Doers*, and *praiſe* and *encourage* thoſe that do *well*; if the Governours of the *Church*, who are ſtil'd *Angels* in Scripture, would act like the Angels in this Parable, and curiouſly inſpect the Religion of their Charge, and by ſuch Methods as the Laws allow, either turn the Tares into good Seed (which, though impoſſible in *Nature*, yet *may be*, and I hope, often *is* done in *Religion*) or pluck 'em up, if ſtubborn and irreclaimable; if Governours of *private Families*, warm'd with the like holy Zeal, would take the like Meaſures, and either *reform* their irreligious Servants and Dependents, or elſe rid themſelves of 'em, and bring 'em to due legal Puniſhment: If this wholeſome Courſe were taken with due *Diligence*, Luk. 20. 36.

Watchfulneſs and Prudence, *Vice* would ſoon be *diſhearten'd*, and *Vertue* more and more thrive and *Increaſe*; God's *Honour* would be vindicated, the *Credit* of Religion *redeemed*, our own *temporal* Happineſs *advanced*, and innumerable Souls ſav'd, that otherwiſe would for ever have *periſh'd*.

And *this* would be a Work truly *worthy* of *Chriſtians*; 'tis an *angelick* Undertaking; and every Man that prays, *hallow'd be thy Name*, *thy Kingdom come*, *thy Will be done in Earth as 'tis in Heaven*, is bound in his own *Sphere*, and according to his beſt *Ability*, to *promote* what is contain'd in thoſe Petitions, to the Glory of God and the Intereſt of Religion; as he expects and hopes to have an Anſwer of the *following* Petitions, and *receive his daily Bread*, *and have his Treſpaſſes forgiven him*, and *to be preſerved or ſupported in Temptation*, and *delivered from Evil*.

The *fifth* thing this Parable informs us of, is the Reaſon why God will not *ſuffer* the Angels as *yet* to *gather out* the Tares from among the good Seed, to diſcriminate Hypocritical from ſincere Chriſtians, and give them their due Puniſhment; namely, *leſt while they gather up the Tares*, *they root up alſo the Wheat with them*; and therefore he ſuffers *both to grow together until the Harveſt*. That is, in other Words, the Reaſon of God's *Forbearance* of the *Wicked*, and not ſuffering the Angels, thoſe Miniſters of his Juſtice, to puniſh them in *this*

this World according to what they *deserve*; is his great Care and Tenderness, even of the *temporal* Quiet and Safety of the *Righteous:* Which, by Reason of their *Intermixture* with the *wicked* here, would at *least* be very much *disturb'd* through the rooting up a wicked Generation; and without the Help of a Miracle, many a *good* Man might perish in so great a Ruin. But Miracles we find God has never thought fit to work, but upon urgent *Necessity*, when his own *Glory*, and the Interest of *Religion* and the *Church* cannot *otherwise* be secur'd; now there being *no* such *Necessity* of punishing the wicked by destroying 'em in *this* World, nor consequently of *miraculously preserving* those that are truly good from a general Ruin; for the End of the World, that great Day of Recompence, is not far off, and both may live together untill then; God, for the Sake of the sincerely good, lest *the Rod of the wicked should come into the Lot of the righteous*, does *generally* restrain the Zeal of those blessed Spirits the Angels, and forbears the Tares till that universal Harvest, when the Earth shall be eas'd of its Burthen, and then the *good Seed* shall be gather'd together in *Safety*, and the *Tares* left to be *consum'd* in that great Conflagration, when the World and all that remains in it shall be burnt up with Fire unquenchable. And when, in Case of almost a *total* Corruption of a City or Nation, and to strike a Terror in-

to others, and convince the obdurate World that God *ſees* and is able to *puniſh* obſtinate and irreclaimable Sinners, God thinks fit to ſuffer his bright Hoſt of Angels, utterly to *deſtroy* ſuch wicked Places as ſometimes we know he hath done; we have ſeveral Inſtances in Scripture and other Hiſtories of the *miraculous* Preſervation of the *good*; and that, as the Pſalmiſt expreſſes it, *though Thouſands have fallen by their Side* the Deſtruction *has not come nigh them; for he gives his Angels Charge over them, to keep 'em in all their Ways.*

Pſal. 91.

Of this great Care of Providence over the good, either in preſerving for their Sakes, *Communities* deſtin'd to Ruin, or elſe covering *them* under the Wings of *Providence*, and ſhielding them from Danger till the Storm was over; there is an Inſtance in the 18. of *Geneſis* ſo very remarkable that I can't paſs it by. In the 23. Verſe of that Chapter, we find *Abraham* interceeding with God for *Sodom* and *Gomorrha* (which he had reſolv'd to deſtroy for the abominable and incurable Wickedneſs that was in them) and he begins with what he thought would moſt prevail with God to ſpare the Place, and tells him the *Safety* of the *Righteous* would be hazarded, and that *they* would ſhare in the common Deſtruction; and therefore, leſt he ſhould ſlay the righteous with the wicked, which he knew the Judge of all the Earth would be far from doing, he pleads with him for the

Sake

Sake of *Fifty Righteous* that ſhould be found there (a ſmall Number, one would think, and eaſie to be found in ſuch *populous*, though *wicked Places*) and at length (being encourag'd by God's wondrous Goodneſs, who comply'd with him in every Requeſt, and as he *ſunk* the Number promis'd him he would not deſtroy) he, by degrees, deſcends to Ten; which was as far as ever his Modeſty would reach, and one would think far enough to ſecure the moſt wicked City upon Earth. Peradventure *Ten* be found there: *And God ſaid unto him, I will not deſtroy it for Ten's Sake.* Rather than thoſe *Ten* ſhould be in Danger of periſhing in the general Ruin, he will *recall* the deſtroying Angel, and at leaſt *reſpite* the Execution of his Vengeance; and for *their* Sakes *reprieve* the condemn'd Place of their Abode. And when, through the *extream* Wickedneſs of thoſe Cities that *ſmall* Number of good Men was not found in them, and God therefore proceeded to ſhower down his fiery Indignation upon 'em, yet he remembers *righteous Lot* and his ſmall Family, and ſends two Angels to conduct 'em ſafely out of that accurſed Place, who *haſten'd Lot*, leſt he ſhould be conſum'd in the Iniquity of the Cities, and upon his Requeſt ſpared *Zoar*, which he fled to, and bid him make haſte thither, for that they could not do any thing till *he* was eſcap'd out of Danger; as you may read *Gen.* 19. 22.

And

And what a boundleſs Ocean is the Goodneſs of God! That he ſhould, not only ſo graciouſly accept the *imperfect* Services of his own People, as to take *them* into his peculiar Care and Protection; but for their *Sakes* likewiſe (that Deſtruction might not ſo much as come *nigh* their Dwellings) to ſpare *thoſe* that have juſtly *merited* the ſevereſt Expreſſes of his *Diſpleaſure!* This does indeed verify the Words of the Pſalmiſt, that his *Mercy is over all his Works.*

And this, as it ſhould be a new Motive and Encouragement to *true* Holineſs, which will be ſo great a Security in perillous Times both to our ſelves and others; and demonſtrates the great *Ingratitude* and *Baſeneſs* of the *World*, in hating and deſpiſing and afflicting the good, who yet are as ſo many *guardian Angels* to it, and ſhield it from the Expreſſes of God's juſt *Vengeance:* So it will ſilence that *Objection* againſt *Providence*, drawn from the continued Safety and Proſperity of the wicked, notwithſtanding their living in open *Defiance* of God and his Commands. For we ſee, they are but *repriev'd* for the Sake of the righteous, leſt *they* ſhould be involv'd in the Ruin pour'd upon the ungodly: Their Puniſhment is but *reſpited* for a *little* while, and at the great Aſſize God's Juſtice will have its full Courſe, and ſink 'em into everlaſting Ruin. And as the *Huſbandman* may *obſerve* the Tares are among his good Corn, and reſolve at length to bind

bind 'em up in Bundles and burn them, though his prudential Care of the good Corn inclines him to let them alone till the *Harveſt*, and not pluck 'em up whilſt the good Corn is ſtanding and growing to Perfection, leſt *it* be rooted up together with them: So *God ſees* and reſolves in due Time to *puniſh* according to their Demerit the vile hypocritical Chriſtians, but in a wiſe and tender Regard for the ſafety of the *ſincerely* good, *with-holds* his Judgments during their Abode in the World, but will ſurely repay the wicked Wretches what they have deſerv'd, in the great Day of *Recompence*.

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caſt them into a Furnace of Fire, where ſhall be wailing and gnaſhing of Teeth: And then ſhall the righteous ſhine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

That is, when the *Cloſe* of the World ſhall come, and the whole intelligent Creation be met together at the Summons of the *Trump of God*; *Men* to receive their ſeveral *Sentences*, whether of *Abſolution* or *Condemnation*, according to their ſeveral Deſerts; and *Angels* to execute theſe Sentences: Then ſhall the *ſincerely good* Chriſtians *indeed* and in Truth, be plac'd by the bleſſed Angels of God on the *right* Hand of the *glorious and juſt* Judg, and after a Diſplay of their excellent Piety and Charity to all the World, hear this joyful Sound, *Come ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepar'd for you from the Foundation of the World*; and then, be immediately *caught up into the Clouds to meet their dear Lord in the Air, and from thenceforth be for ever with him*; *and ſhine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father*, having Crowns of *eternal Glory* plac'd upon their *Heads*, and loud and rapturous *Halleluja's* in their *Mouths*: Whilſt thoſe miſerable Wretches, that knew no more of Chriſtianity than the *Name*, in whom Religion was only Shew and *Formality*, having no real Influence upon thir *Lives*, and bringing forth no *Fruits* of Piety, whilſt *theſe*, ſhall find to their *Confuſion*, that God is not to be *mock'd*, and be plac'd on the

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left Hand as Veſſels of *Wrath*, and be doom'd to *depart* for ever from the *Fountain of Happineſs*, into eternal *Burnings, prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels.*

Then will the good find by a *happy* Experience, that there is indeed a *Reward for the Righteous*, and that, however they were *laugh'd* at and *diſcourag'd here, their Labour is not in vain in the Lord.* And then will the Mock Hypocritical Chriſtians be ſadly aſſur'd, notwithſtanding all their Plea of having eaten and drank in the Preſence of the Judge and at his Table, and of his having taught in their Streets; that without *real* and ſubſtantial *Holineſs no Man ſhall ſee the Lord.* And inſtead of being receiv'd into their Maſter's Joy, for *cringing* and *fawning* upon him, and giving him magnificent Titles, *Lord, Lord, Jeſus, Saviour*, but heeding little his Commandments; they ſhall be rejected with *I know you not, depart from me ye Workers of Iniquity.*

And then will God be *juſtifyed* in the Face of the whole World, and found to be, not an *unconcern'd* Spectator of the Affairs of Man-kind, but a *wiſe, all-knowing* and *juſt* Governour of the Univerſe: And though *Clouds and Darkneſs ſeem here to be round about him, yet Righteouſneſs and Judgment are the Eſtabliſhment of his Throne.* Then will there be eternal *Joy* and *Exultation* of the bliſsful beatify'd Souls of the *righteous*, and weeping and wailing and gnaſhing of Teeth in the wretched Companies of the

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Damn'd for ever. *Behold, the Day cometh, ſaith the Prophet* Malachi, *that ſhall burn like an Oven, and all the proud, and all they that do wickedly ſhall be as Stubble, and the Day that cometh, ſaith the Lord of Hoſts, ſhall burn them up, that it ſhall leave them neither Root nor Branch. And in that Day ſhall Men ſeek Death and ſhall not find it, and ſhall deſire to die, and Death ſhall flee from them.*

Mal. 4. 1.

Rev. 9. 6.

And now for a *Concluſion* of the whole Matter: Since from this Parable of our Lord's, it appears, that though an *empty Shew* of Religion may paſs well enough in *this* World, and meet with no open Diſcrimination or Puniſhment from God *here*; yet there ſhall moſt certainly be an *after* Reckoning, when all the *Thoughts* and *Intentions* of Men's Hearts ſhall be *reveal'd*, and their vile *Hypocriſy* and *ſecret* Impiety laid *open* before *Men* and *Angels*, and an *irreverſible* Doom of greateſt Severity pay'd upon them according to their Deſervings: Since *this* is true, it nearly concerns us all to be Chriſtians in *Reality*, as well as in *Name* and *Appearance*; to obey the *Commands* of Chriſt, as well as call him *Lord*, and to approve our ſelves true Diſciples of this holy Inſtitution, by leading our Lives *in all holy Converſation and Godlineſs*; diligently endeavouring *to be found of this great Judg in Peace, without Spot and blameleſs.* Remembring *that God ſhall bring every Work into Judgment, with every*

ry ſecret thing, whether it be good or evil; and that the wicked ſhall go into everlaſting Puniſhment, but the righteous into Life eternal.

The PRAYER.

I.

O Holy Saviour, Jeſus, from whom are deriv'd all our Poſſibilities of Salvation, the Means of Grace and the Hopes of Glory; but who expecteſt our Concurrence with thy gracious Endeavours for our Hapineſs, and for the Tryal of our Sincerity, permitteſt thine and our great Enemy to ſcatter his helliſh Injections where thou ſoweſt thy heavenly Doctrin: I earneſtly intreat thee, ſo to aſſiſt me with thy Life-giving Spirit, that my Faith and Obedience, which thou haſt made the Condition of my Happineſs, may be ſo vigorous and active, as to manifeſt that I am thine, not only in Word and in Shew, but in Deed and in Truth. Grant that I may ever eſteem thoſe inward Motions which I feel to a progreſſive Holineſs, to be what indeed they are, thy gracious Endeavours to promote my eternal Welfare; and may I always thankfully and chearfully embrace and follow them. And whatever Thoughts and Inclinations tend to diſcourage ſincere Religion,

Religion, and perſwade to reſt in the Formality of it; for thy Mercies Sake, help me to reject them with the greateſt Abhorrence and Indignation, as the Endeavours of Satan to involve me in his own Ruin! And ſince 'tis while we ſleep that our great Adverſary ſowes theſe his Tares: Give me Grace, O bleſſed Jeſus, to awake to Righteouſneſs, and rouze from my thoughtleſs Inadvertency, and ſhake off my Dreams of Vanity, leſt this ſpiritual Slumber at length prove fatal and betray me into eternal Death.

II.

Thou haſt aſſur'd us, O Lord, to whom the Father hath committed all Judgment, that this Life is the only Time of our Probation; O therefore grant, that now, in this our Day, all we that name the Name of Chriſt may depart from Iniquity, and embrace the things that belong to our Peace before they be hid from our Eyes! That by ſerious Conſideration, we may make Religion our Choice, and adhere to it firmly, with all our Powers and Faculties, and be in Reality thy peculiar People, zealous of good Works; remembring thy bleſſed Words, *why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I command?* And that, though here the wicked go unpuniſh'd, it will not be always ſo, and at laſt Hypocriſy ſhall meet with its Deſerts. And may I always ſo attend to the Dignity of my Nature, and the conſtant Inſpection of

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thy holy Angels and glorious Self in all my Ways, as not to dare to play the Hypocrite in thy Preſence, who ſeeſt the very Secrets of my Heart, and be aſham'd to expoſe my Vileneſs to thoſe excellent Spirits, and reflect upon the Confuſion I ſhall be in at the Day of Judgment, when the Goat and the Swine ſhall be diſcover'd under the Profeſſion of a Chriſtian.

And, O that the Zeal and Alacrity of theſe miniſtring Spirits in thy Service, and for thy Glory, may put me upon a holy Emulation to do thy Will on Earth as it is done in Heaven! That ſo, when the great Harveſt ſhall come, and thou ſhalt ſay to the angelick Reapers, *Gather ye together firſt the Tares, and bind them in Bundles to burn them; but gather my Wheat into my Barn*, I may find Mercy at that terrible Day, and be receiv'd to a Participation of the Glories of thy heavenly Kingdom.

Which grant, O bleſſed Jeſus, I moſt earneſtly beſeech thee. Amen.

PARABLE III.

Of the Pearl of great Price.

Matth. xiii. 45, 46

The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a Merchant-man, ſeeking goodly Pearls: Who, when he had found one Pearl of great Price, he went and ſold all that he had, and bought it.

BY *this*, and the Parable immediately before it, of *a Treaſure hid in a Field, which, when a Man hath found he hideth, and for Joy thereof, goeth and ſelleth all that he hath and buyeth that Field*; The tranſcendent Excellency of the Chriſtian Religion above all things in the World, is repreſented: And that 'tis the greateſt Wiſdom to part with every thing that this World can afford, all the Pleaſures, Honours and Riches of it rather than be without the inward Power and Life of this holy Religion; which is

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a *Pearl of ſo great Price*, ſo immenſe a *Treaſure*, that nothing here below can ſtand in Competition with it. 'Tis, as *David* expreſſes it, *more to be deſir'd than Gold, yea, than much fine Gold*; and he profeſſes that himſelf had *more Delight in God's Commandments than in all Manner of Riches*. And *Solomon* ſays (almoſt in the Words of theſe Parables) *Happy is the Man that* findeth *Wiſdom*, or Religion; *for the* Merchandiſe *of it is better than the Merchandiſe of Silver, and the Gain thereof than of fine Gold*. *She is more* precious than Rubies, *and all the things thou canſt deſire are not to be compar'd unto her: Length of Days is in her right Hand, and in her left Hand Riches and Honour: her Ways are Ways of Pleaſantneſs, and all her Paths are Peace.* Pſal. 19. 10. Prov. 3. 13, &c.

Such great things as theſe being ſpoken of Religion, by thoſe that beſt knew its Excellency; and the World being ſo very backward in the Belief of their Teſtimony, and ſo fooliſh as to prefer every *little* worldly Good before this ineſtimable Treaſure, to which, all that the *whole Creation* can afford is not comparable; and the *Conſequence* of this Deluſion being ſo *fatal*, no leſs than the eternal Ruin of both Body and Soul: It highly concerns us by due Conſideration to rectify our Apprehenſions in this Matter, and no longer childiſhly doat upon empty *Gayes* and Trifles, and neglect what is of infinite Excellency, and the moſt *ſubſtantial* Good.

It is therefore the Deſign of this Diſcourſe upon the Parable above recited, to weigh the Excellency of *Religion* againſt all that the *World* can afford in the Ballance of *Reaſon*, that upon a fair Experiment we may ſee which does preponderate, and accordingly be *convinc'd* which of the Two is moſt *worthy* our *Choice:* And then, if we ſtill retain our Affection for the *World* againſt the Judgment of our *Reaſon* in behalf of *Religion*; we ſhall likewiſe be convinc'd that we act more like *Brutes* than *Men*, and that we deſerve to feel the Conſequences of our unreaſonable and wicked Choice, and taſte no other Happineſs than what this *unſatisfying empty World* can afford; and in the next World be for ever *miſerable*, becauſe we *would* not be for ever *happy* when we *might*.

Firſt then, let us ſee what the *Whole* that this *World* can afford will amount to. All that is in the World, St. *John* tells us, *is the Luſt of the Fleſh, the Luſt of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life*; *i. e.* to theſe Three may be reduc'd the Whole of what is valuable in the World: And by the *Luſt of the Fleſh* is meant *Pleaſure of* all Sorts; by the *Luſt of the Eye Riches*, great *Plenty* and *Abundance*; and by the *Pride of Life*, *Honour*, *Power* and *Dominion*. This is that *Trinity* which the generality of Men adore, and impatiently deſire and place their greateſt Happineſs in the Enjoyment of; and of each of theſe Particulars, we will now enquire

1 Eph. 2. 16.

quire what they amount to, and conſequently what is the Sum total of the World.

And firſt, to obſerve the Apoſtles Method, we will begin with the *Luſts of the Fleſh*, or the *Pleaſures* of the World, and which are generally *firſt* in Men's Eſteem, and for which they are often content to part with the other Two. Now theſe may be rank'd in this Order, *viz.* the Pleaſures of *Luſt* and Uncleanneſs, of luxurious *Eating and Drinking*, and of great *Jollity and Mirth*; all agreeing in the Character of the Luſts of the Fleſh, that is, all highly gratefull to the Deſires and Appetites of the Body. And in the firſt Place I obſerve this in general of all worldly Pleaſures, that the longer a Man *lives* to enjoy them, the more *inſipid* ſtill they grow to him; and that, not only upon Account of their own *empty Nature*, but by Reaſon of the Decays of our own *Faculties*, and conſequent *Diſability* to enjoy them. As old *Barzillai* ſaid to *David*; *Can I diſcern between Good and Evil?* &c. when he invited him to the Pleaſures of his Court. And what Happineſs can be expected from that which is very unſatisfying in its own Nature, and which, were it *not* after a few Years we ſhall be incapable of enjoying? But to be more *particular*: As for the Pleaſures of *Luſt and Uncleanneſs*; whatever Men's *Expectations* may be of receiving great Satisfaction from them, they can't but find by their Experience, that there is much of

2 Sam. 19. 35.

Diſappointment in 'em, and the Pleaſure much greater in *Imagination* than *Reality*: They are indeed *deceitful* Luſts, and often make Men *miſerable*, even *here*, but never happy. And for the Truth of this (that it may not be look'd upon as a thing only *ſaid*, not *prov'd*, and the cinical Concluſion of a frozen diſpirited Student, whoſe narrow Courſe of Life has made him a Stranger to ſuch Sort of Enjoyments, and caus'd him to give a worſe Character of them than they deſerve) I ſhall vouch the Teſtimony of *Solomon*; who fill'd the Throne of a rich and flouriſhing Kingdom, and was accountable to none but *God* for Actions of this Nature, and his Deſires perfectly without any *humane* Reſtraint; and who made it his Buſineſs to find out what was the greateſt Happineſs of Man in this World, and *whatſoever his Eyes deſir'd he kept not from them; he with-held not his Heart from any Joy*; and who, amongſt other Delights, had great Numbers of *Wives* and *Concubines*, to the Number of *Seven Hundred Wives* 1 Kings 11. 3. that were *Princeſſes*, and *Three Hundred Concubines*, and theſe the faireſt, doubtleſs, that could be met with: Variety enough, one would think, to take off all Poſſibility of *loathing* and Deſire of *Change*. But now, what ſays *Solomon* after ſo *full* and *uncontroul'd* Enjoyment of theſe carnal Pleaſures? Why truly in the very Beginning of his Book of *Proverbs*, Chap. 2. 18, 19. he tells the World, that the *Houſe of the Strange*,

or Whoriſh *Woman inclineth unto Death, and her Paths unto the Dead: None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the Paths of Life.* And *Prov.* 5. 3. *The Lips of a ſtrange Woman drop as an hony Comb, and her Mouth is ſmoother than Oyl; but her End,* or the End of having to do with her, *is bitter as Wormwood, ſharp as a two edged Sword.* Very frequent are his Invectives againſt this Vice, and deliver'd with more than ordinary Earneſtneſs: And in the *7th.* Chapter of *Eccleſiaſtes* (the Book of his Recantations) he publickly declares, that he *finds* (as by his own *Experience*) *He finds more bitter than Death, the Woman whoſe Heart is Snares and her Hands as Bands; whoſo pleaſeth God ſhall eſcape from her, but the Sinner ſhall be taken by her.* Verſ. 26. As if 'twere a *peculiar* Providence of God, to protect a *good* Man from falling into ſo great a Miſchief, and that he ſuffers the wicked to be enſnar'd by it as a ſevere Puniſhment and great Expreſſion of his *Diſpleaſure.* And in the next Verſe, *Behold, ſays the Preacher, this have I found, counting one by one to find out the Account, which yet my Soul ſeeketh, but I find not: One Man among a Thouſand have I found, but a Woman among all thoſe have I not found.* That is, he did at laſt meet with a *Man* that anſwer'd his Expectations as a Friend or faithful Servant: But among all his *Concubines,* not *one* but who baulk'd and diſappointed his fond Hopes of

Happineſs from the Enjoyment of her, and *depriv'd* him of more Satisfaction than ſhe gave him.

And thus we ſee, from the Confeſſion of *Solomon* himſelf, who gratified his *carnal* Appetite to the *full*, and experienc'd the utmoſt of what *Luſt* and *Wantonneſs* could afford; that this Sort of Pleaſure amounts to no more than this, *Diſhonour* and *Diſappointment* always, and not ſeldom *Diſeaſes* and *Death*.

Let us now proceed to enquire what the Pleaſures of *luxurious Eating*, and *intemperate Drinking* will amount to. All that it can *pretend* to is the Gratification of the *Taſte* and *Palate*: For, as for true *Nouriſhment*, High Feeding falls far ſhort of more *ordinary* Diet; and as for refreſhing and *cheriſhing* the Spirits, a *moderate* Quantity of Wine is ſufficient, and what is more than *that*, ends in a Fit of Madneſs, and *impoveriſhes* Nature. Now, the Pleaſures of the *Palate* make the *beſt* of them, are of very *ſhort* Continuance, no ſooner taſted but they vaniſh; and the Stomach will not *bear* a long *Repetition* of this Pleaſure, and is ſooneſt *cloy'd* and *ſurfeited* with what is of the *richeſt* Guſt and Reliſh: And the *Inconveniences* that attend this *ſhort-liv'd* and very *imperfect* Pleaſure, are *great* and of very *long* Continuance. For, ſuppoſe a Mans Revenues to be ſo large that he can bear the *Expence* of Luxury, without weakening his *Fortune* in the leaſt, and ſo that very

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uſual ill Conſequence of it, cannot in this Caſe be charg'd upon it, yet others full as great may. As firſt, the more a Man *indulges* his Palate, the harder he will find it to be pleas'd, and at length 'twill grow ſo *troubleſomely* nice, that its *Diſguſts* will be more frequent than its *Pleaſure*; and ſo, inſtead of procuring a conſtant *Gratification* of the Palate, Luxury is the ready Way to make a Man *diſreliſh* almoſt eve. ry thing: Which muſt needs make his Life a continual *Vexation* and Uneaſineſs; and a *Plowman* with his coarſe Fare, and no other *Sauce* to it but a *good Stomach*, will experience far greater and more *laſting* Pleaſure in *eating and drinking*, than the greateſt *Epicure* in the World. And therefore, Luxury is indeed the *wrong* Way to procure an intire Gratification of the Palate, and *deſtroys* what it pretends to *create*. Another very ill Conſequence of Luxury is, that it mightily weakens and *impairs Health*, and makes a Man a *living Hoſpital*, full of Diſeaſes, and very often cuts his Days off in the *Midſt*. And thus does an *over-Indulgence* to the Body cruciate and deſtroy it, and by an extravagant Care to *pleaſe* the Palate, Men bring upon themſelves a Neceſſity of taking ſuch *medicinal* Compoſitions as are abundantly more *nauſeous* to it, than ever the moſt artificial Diſhes or richeſt Wines were *grateful*.

And by this Time we perceive what luxurious Eating and drinking amounts to; truly

truly no more than this, a very *ſhort imperfect Pleaſure*, attended with *great* and *durable ill Conſequences*, which abundantly outweigh the *Pleaſure*, and would do ſo were it *Greater* and more *laſting* than it is.

Another Deſire of the Fleſh is *Mirth and Jollity*, a thoughtleſs Courſe of Life, ſpent in *Recreations*, in Laughter, and an *airy* facetious Way of Converſation; and this is very taking with Abundance of People, and he counted the happieſt Man that can ſpend his Days in this Manner, and has little elſe to do. Well then, ſuppoſe a Man ſo intirely diſengag'd from the Fatigues of Buſineſs, as to have his Time wholly at his own Diſpoſal; ſuppoſe him to be of a brisk lively Temper, and free from all Care and Trouble, and that he has the Converſation of ſuch as are as ſprightly as himſelf, ſo that the Day ſeems too ſhort for their Mirth and Pleaſantry, their Paſtimes and Recreations: Suppoſe all this, that is, ſuppoſe a Man to have all of this Kind of Pleaſure that the World can afford, we ſhall find upon a nearer View, that there is as great an *Alloy* here as in the Inſtances before mention'd.

Solomon, who was a very competent Judg in this Matter, and for a conſiderable Time made Jollity his *Buſineſs*, and taſted as much of it as 'tis poſſible for a Man to do; was ſo much of this Mind, as to pronounce it not only *Vanity*, but *Vexation of Spirit*. He gave himſelf wholly up to *Mirth* (as he

he tells us, *Prov.* 2. 1. &c.) and the Pleaſures of *Wine*, with *agreeable Company*: He planted beautiful Gardens, Vineyards and Groves, interwoven with artificial Streams; to improve the Reliſh of thoſe his Delights; and as the Crown of all, he had all Sorts of *Muſick* attending him, both vocal and inſtrumental; ſo that he had whatever his Heart could deſire to make himſelf happy this Way if this could do it. And what was the Reſult of all this? Why truly, a few ſerious reflecting Thoughts diſcover'd to him, that *All was but Vanity and Vexation of Spirit. I ſaid of Laughter, it is mad, and of Mirth, what doth it?* And what doth it indeed? 'Tis *profitable* for nothing, and when *exceſſive*, and attended too *extravagantly*, 'tis *naturally* as well as *morally* an Evil; It *unmans* and effeminates the *Soul*, and *diſpirits* and hebetates the *Body*. The moſt *profuſe Laughter* ends in a *Sigh*, and *Uneaſineſs*, and looks much like *Madneſs*, and is a certain Indication of *Folly*. A *decent chearfulneſs* is commendable upon many Accounts; but to make a *Trade* of Jollity, to be always upon the *Laugh*, and ſpend the *greateſt* Part of a Man's *Time* in Recreations and *Diverſions*; as 'tis a very *childiſh* thing, and looks much like the Behaviour of *Naturals* and *Changelings*, ſo 'tis a very *uneaſie* thing too, and grows from a *Pleaſure* into a *Toil* and *Burthen*. Witneſs ſuch Perſons frequent ſhifting and *changing* one Diverſion for another, how at a *Loſs* ſomtimes they are, how to diſpoſe of their Time,

Time, and what Sport to go to next, and how quickly *tir'd* they are with their idle Employment? And, it may be very truly ſaid, there is *leſs* of Pleaſure in a Courſe of Life that is always *hunting* after Pleaſure, and intent upon nothing elſe, than in a more ſevere ſerious Way of living, which *but now and then*, and *ſparingly*, taſtes of Mirth and Recreations, and ſoon returns to things of more Weight and Concern. And the Reaſon is, thoſe *light* Sort of Enjoyments are ſo empty of what will gratify a *rational Soul*, that they preſently grow *flat* and *inſipid*, and become *tedious* rather than *diverting*, when *too long* dwelt upon, and ſuck'd too *dry*. A *ſhort tranſient* Enjoyment is moſt agreeable to their *fading*, periſhing Nature; and as he enjoys the Fragrancy of a *Roſe* both *more* and *longer*, who ſmells of it *gently* and with frequent *Intermiſſions*, than he that uſes it more *roughly*, and preſſes it too *conſtantly* and too *hard*; ſo he experiences much *more* of the *Sweet* of *Mirth and Pleaſantry*; who but *ſeldom* and *moderately* uſes it, than he that makes it his *Buſineſs*, and follows it as *cloſe* as others do their *Callings*. Even in *Laughter* (when extravagant) ſays the wiſe King, *The Heart is ſorrowful, and the End of that Mirth is Heavineſs:* Nay, he ſays, *'tis better to go to the Houſe of Mourning than to the Houſe of Feaſting*; for that may have ſome ſubſtantial *good Effect* upon a Man, *Death being the End of all Men*, and the *living*,

Eccleſ. 7. 2.

living, at ſuch ſerious Times, may be inclin'd to *lay it to Heart*; whereas *Jollity* and *Mirth* wholly evaporate into *Folly*, and leave nothing behind them that is any Way *profitable*, unleſs it be *Repentance*. Sorrow and Seriouſneſs make Men *conſider*, and become receptive of wiſe Inſtructions; but a light, *frothy* Temper, both *expoſes* a Man's Folly, and fatally prevents his growing *wiſer*: It ſhews that he *is* a Fool, and that he is like to *continue* ſo. For, *as the crackling of Thorns under a Pot, ſo is the Laughter of a Fool*; there is much of *Noiſe* in it, but it ſerves to no other Purpoſe than to *ſhame himſelf*. And thus we have ſeen what the Heigth of *Mirth and Jollity* amounts to; namely, *Diſappointment*, *Vexation and Uneaſineſs*, *Shame* and *Vanity*, *Madneſs* and *Folly*.

Having thus ſumm'd up the true Value of *one* of the *Three* things in which conſiſts the Happineſs of the World, the *Luſts of the Fleſh*, or thoſe things which more immediately gratifie our *bodily Appetites*; let us now look into the

Second, which is call'd by the Apoſtle, the *Luſt of the Eyes*; that is, *Riches* and great Abundance of *this World's Good*, ſuch as *ample Poſſeſſions*, *magnificent Structures*, *a ſplendid Equipage*, *glorious Apparel*, and the like: Which are call'd the *Luſts of the Eyes*, becauſe 'tis the Senſe of *ſeeing* that theſe things affect with the greateſt Pleaſure.

Now, ſuppoſe a Man to have *all* of this Nature that the *World* can help him to; ſuppoſe

ſuppoſe he has Riches enough to anſwer all theſe things, to *provide* all this Splendor and Magnificence, and to *ſupport* and *maintain* it: What more will it amount to, than, as *Solomon* expreſſes it, *the beholding of it with our Eyes*?

Eccleſ. 5. 11.

For, as for great Treaſures of *Gold and Silver*, though they may procure many things to delight the *Eye* and pleaſe the *Fancy*, yet the Man that hath 'em remains ſtill as *Nature made him*, none of the Powers or Faculties either of his Soul or Body receive any *Improvement* nor Alteration unleſs it be for the *worſe*. But Mony will erect *magnificent* and ſtately *Buildings*, 'twill purchaſe *rich Furniture*, and all that Art can do to adorn and beautify them. 'Tis true, it will ſo; but, will thoſe ſtately Structures preſerve a Man better from the Injuries of the *Air* and *Weather* than more ordinary Houſes? Shall a Man *ſleep better* in a *coſtly* than a *meaner* Bed? And, will a Fever handle him more gently that lies within Curtains of *Velvet*, and has his Chamber adorn'd in the moſt coſtly Manner, than one that is contented with a cleanly Meanneſs? If not, ſtill 'tis the *Eye* that receives all the *Pleaſure*.

As for the ſplendid *Equipage* of the Men of great Poſſeſſions, a Croud of Attendants following them, in gay Liveries, glittering Coaches, and the like; this may pleaſe the *Eye* too; but what more does it effect? 'Tis but Two or Three of thoſe Attendants that

can

can be *serviceable*, the rest are own'd to be for *State* only, and are kept for little else than to eat and drink and be troublesome; and the Experience of all Men will tell us, that he is the happiest Man that stands in need of the *fewest* Servants, and retains no more than he stands in *need of*. As for fine Coaches and glorious Apparel, if *Gold* upon a Coach, and *costly Trappings* would make a Journy more safe and easie, and if rich Clothes would keep one *Warmer*, or last *longer*, or be less *troublesome* than a more ordinary Habit, there might be something said for them: But, since there is nothing of this in them, nay, rather they are *less* serviceable to the Ends they were at first design'd for, and that *over-Niceness* and *Curiosity* in *Dress* or any thing else is the Occasion of much *Disturbance* and *Uneasiness*: The beholding these gay things with the *Eye*, is all that is considerable in them. And, what does the *beholding* of all these splendid Sights amount to? Is there any *through* and *lasting* Pleasure in it, any thing that will make a Man *happy*, or so much as *promote* his Happiness? Why truly, *Solomon*, who experienc'd all of this Nature to the *full*, gives us this Account of it; *He that loveth Silver shall not be satisfyed with Silver, nor he that loveth Abundance with Increase: When Goods are increased they are increased that eat them, and what Good is there to the Owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their Eyes?* A

1 Kings 10.

Eccl. 2. 4.

— 11.

Eccl. 5. 10.

Pleasure

Pleasure very empty and unsatisfying (*for the Eye is not satisfyed with seeing*) and which their meanest *Servant* may have as well as they.

Content is least of all in the Breasts of Persons of the *highest Rank*; he that has much would still have *more*, and is in frequent Fears of *losing* what he has; for Riches are known to be very *uncertain*, and unaccountably take to themselves Wings and fly away: and to be in fear of *losing* Riches, and yet *dissatisfi'd* in the *Possession* of them, carries much more of *Uneasiness* with it, than the *beholding* of them with ones *Eyes* does of *Pleasure*; and a Stranger or a Servant may take not only as *much*, but *more* Pleasure in the Sight, that has none of the inward *Discontent*, than the Proprietor and Master that *hath*. So true is that of the Apostle. *They that will be rich fall into Temptation and a Snare, and pierce themselves through with divers Sorrows*; and *Contentment* with only Food and Raiment is a much greater Happiness. To so very little in reality does arise the *Second* thing, in which consists the Happiness of the *World*, the Gratification of the *Lust of the Eyes*; even to nothing but *Dissatisfaction* and *Disquiet*, *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit*.

1 Tim. 6. 9, 10.

Come we now to examin the *third* Part of this World's Treasure, the *Pride of Life*, or, *Honour, Power and Dominion*. And very fitly is this stil'd the *Pride of Life*, it being the Aim of most men to be *great*, to

to *command and govern*, and to have much of Honour and *Reſpect* paid to them; and in this they *pride* themſelves more than in any other worldly Good that they poſſeſs. But, what is there in all this that a Man can juſtly value at ſo high a Rate? Suppoſe a Man to be Monarch of the *whole World*, to be without Controul from any one on Earth, and to give Laws to every Man beſides; ſuppoſe many inferiour Princes tributary to him, and that he is honoured like a mortal God; ſuppoſe all this, yet, however glorious it may appear at a *Diſtance*, we ſhall find, upon a cloſer Inſpection that *this* likewiſe is *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit*.

For, as for even an *univerſal* Dominion, unleſs the Subjects were as willing to *obey*, as the Monarch is deſirous to *govern*, a *Catholic* Crown would ſit as uneaſie, nay, *more* ſo, than that of leſſer Princes. The further a Man's Dominion extends, the more *Difficulties* in Government will occur; the more ambitious and diſcontented Spirits will there be to tame and keep in order; the more ſecret Conſpiracies and Underminings of Men aggriev'd *and diſoblig'd*, and that are as deſirous of Government as he that ſits in the Throne can be: And which, will often break out to ſhake and *diſcompoſe*, if not to *overturn* the preſent Eſtabliſhment. And the more extenſive a Princes Dominions are, the more muſt there be employ'd in the Government of them,

and thoſe, Men of different Intereſts and Inclinations, *jealous* of one another, and *envious* at the *Supreme*, and more ready to carve for themſelves and advance their own Families, than ſincerely to endeavour the Proſperity of their Maſter. This is found very true, and the Occaſion of much Trouble and Diſquiet, to Princes that have Affairs more in their *own View* than this *univerſal* Monarch can be ſuppoſed to have; and therefore much more dangerouſly muſt *he* ſit than *they*, and receive much more *Diſquietude* and Trouble if he takes *Notice* of the Motion of his great Orb; and if he does *not*, where is the Pleaſure of governing?

So that the moſt *ample* Dominion is thickeſt ſet with Thorns and Briars while enjoyed, and in continual Danger of a Ruin; which muſt perplex him that is *ſenſible* of it, with numberleſs Fears and Jealouſies, and anxious Thoughts how to *ſecure* his Throne: And he that is careleſs and *unſenſible*, and leaves the Fatigues of Government to *Others*, and ſpends his Days in nothing but Eaſe and *Luxury*; is an Emperour in *Title* only, and may ſoon, for any thing he knows, be not ſo much as *that*. The *one* leads a Life of *Vanity*, the *other* of *Vexation of Spirit*.

That 'tis *eaſier* to *obey* than to *govern*, is an uſual and very true Saying; and would be ſo, were Thrones not near ſo *ſlippery* as they are; and I am ſure 'tis very much happier for a Man never to have *had* ſuch

Height

Height of Power and Dominion, than ever to ſee himſelf thrown down and laid in the Duſt: The very *Danger* of ſo great a Fall, is enough to fill ones Breaſt with great *Diſorder*, ſo great, as that all the Gauderies of Grandeur ſhall loſe their Taſte, and become *inſipid* to him, and *actually* to fall (as many glorious Princes have already done) is the greateſt Miſery that can be experienc'd upon earth.

The ſhort is, Empire and Dominion, fancy it how great ſoever, is at *beſt* very *troubleſome* and *diſquieting*; and ſo *uncertain*, as that it not ſeldom ends in the very *Depth* of *Ruin*. And as for the *Honour* that goes along with it, *glorious Titles*, *low Obeiſance*, and the like; all of this Nature is ſo perfectly *empty*, and utterly ineffective of any thing that's truly *good* and *Profitable* to a Man, that 'tis of all things the moſt *deſpicable* and of leaſt Regard: And though 'tis fit Inferiours ſhould pay it where 'tis due, yet unleſs an inward Veneration of the *Mind*, attends that outward Reſpect of the *Body*, a great Man is ſo far from being *honoured* by it, that 'tis the greateſt *Mockery* and *Abuſe* that can be. And becauſe no great Man can tell whether he is *inwardly* reverenced or no, neither can force any Man ſo to honour him againſt his Will; 'tis a very great Weakneſs for him to ſet any great *Value* upon *outward* Reſpect, which for ought he knows, nay, in all likelyhood may be, an *Affront* rather than an

Honour to him. And this is what *Honour*, *Power* and *Dominion* amount to.

Having thus given in an impartial Account, and that confirmed by the Experience of *Solomon*, who enjoy'd it all to the *Full*, of the Sum *Total* of what *this World* can afford, that can pretend to be of any Worth and Esteem; by examining the Three Particulars in which is contained all that is valuable in it; namely, *the Lust of the Flesh*, *the Lust of the Eye*, *and the Pride of Life*: Let us now weigh *Religion* against it, and see which does *preponderate*, which is the most *weighty* and *substantial* Good, and consequently, whether the *Merchant* in the Parable did *wisely* or no, in selling *all that he had* that he might purchase *this Pearl*, and be Master of this *Treasure*? And we shall consider Religion in a twofold Respect, with Relation to *this* World as well as the other.

And first, as for the Value of Religion with Relation to *this* World; what is of greater Esteem than *Peace* and *Quietness*, *Contentment* and Satisfaction of *Mind*, a *Long* and *Healthy Life here*, and a comfortable *expectation* of a much *better endless* Life in the Regions of *Glory*? And all this, *Religion* is the only sure Way to attain.

What the World it *self* affords we have seen cannot make us happy in it; its Riches, and Pleasures, and Honours, and Power, and Dominion are empty and unsatisfying; and indeed, the Parent of nothing but *Vexation of Spirit*: And therefore I shall wave the

the Enquiry how far Religion is conducive to *theſe* things; though it might be made apparent, that this is the ſureſt Way even to become *rich*, to live *Pleaſantly*, and with *Honour* and *Reſpect*: and as for Dominion, to govern a Mans *ſelf*, which Religion only teaches, is more than to govern the *World*.

Now, as to Peace and Quietneſs, which are Bleſſings of the firſt Magnitude, and indeed give a Reliſh to every thing elſe; for without them neither Riches, nor Honour, nor even Health and Life it ſelf ſits eaſie; That Religion is the only ſure Way to procure theſe great Bleſſings, and that both in *Private* and in *Publick*, Abroad with others, and at Home in a Mans own Breaſt, will ſoon be evident.

As for Peace and Quietneſs in our Intercourſe with *others*, Religion does manifeſtly tend to procure that, upon theſe two Accounts. (1.) Becauſe it forbids the *offering* any Injuries. (2.) Becauſe it forbids *returning* any. Now that which embroils the World, and is the Occaſion of all Contention, being the *doing* and *Retaliating* Harms and ill Turns, and Religion ſo ſtrictly commanding us to love our Neighbours as our ſelves, to do *to* others nothing but what in like Circumſtances we would be willing to receive *from* others; and to *forgive* if any have done injuriouſly by us, as we hope to be forgiven by God at the Day of Judgment: 'Tis plain that were our holy Religion ſincerely embrac'd, and had its due

Influence upon the Minds of Men, the World might (in the Literal Senſe of the Words) *beat their Swords into Plough-Shares, and their Spears into Pruning-Hooks, and need not learn War any more; nothing would* then *hurt in God's holy Mountain:* And the World would be what God at firſt deſign'd it; a Paradiſe of Happineſs, and Mankind a Family of Love. And as for Peace and Quiet at *Home*, in a Mans own Breaſt, and without which all other Peace would loſe its Reliſh, Religion is the only Way to attain that Bleſſing. For as long as there is ſuch a thing as Conſcience (which there will be as long as a Man is in any Poſſibility of Salvation) it will do its Office freely and impartially, and laſh the Soul that ſins, as often as it ſins, and fill it full of Horror and Confuſion and dreadful Apprehenſions of the juſt Vengeance of God at the Day of Retribution. *There is no Peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked; but their Souls are like the troubled Sea which cannot reſt, and whoſe Waters caſt up Mire and Dirt.* But a *good* Mans Breaſt is quiet and ſerene, full of the Joys of Innocence, and the Applauſes of a *Conſcience void of Offence both towards God and Man.*

And as Peace and Quietneſs, ſo *Contentment* and *Satisfaction* of Mind, is the natural Product of Religion, and of that only.

Without Contentment of Mind, *no* Condition how good ſoever in its ſelf, is pleaſing, and *with* it, *every* Condition is: For Happineſs

pineſs conſiſts in the *Proportion* of the *Object* to the *Deſire*, and he that has the *whole* of what this World can afford, if he deſires ſtill *more*, and thinks his preſent Condition not good enough; is by many Degrees leſs happy than he that muſt *drudge* for his living, but yet is *contented* with his Lot. Happineſs conſiſts not in *Abundance*; he only is indeed a *happy* Man, that is ſo wiſe as to enjoy his preſent Portion, and knows how *patiently* to endure a *worſe* Condition, and dreads a baſe and wicked Action, however gainful and advantagious it may be, even worſe than Death. And he'll for ever be a Slave that can't be ſatisfied with a little.

But the *contented* Man is always eaſy under his preſent Lot; and if his Fortune will not *riſe* to what he could *deſire*, he will bring his Deſires *down* to his *Fortune*; and ſo be ſure of Happineſs, becauſe by this means his Deſires and his Fortune bear a due Proportion to one another. And truly, ſo various are the Turns of Fortune here, ſo many unexpected Accidents that make great Changes for the worſe in Mens Circumſtances of Life, and which 'tis utterly out of their Power to have any Influence upon ſo as to amend; that were there not this Remedy of making our Minds *comply* with the Event, and taking out the Sting and Venom of it by Acquieſcence and Contentment and *Contraction* of our *Deſires*, Man would be the moſt miſerable Creature upon the Face of the Earth. But he that has learned and

can apply this Remedy, whatever he may ſuffer from without, has a Power ſtill ready of turning it into *Good*; and though he can't prevent the *Accident*, yet he can prevent its doing him a *Miſchief*.

Now this excellent Remedy for the Calamities of Life, Religion beſt of all teaches us. For in the firſt place it teaches us that God is the great Governour of the World, and with the exacteſt *Wiſdom*, and *Juſtice*, and *Goodneſs* diſpoſes all things; and conſequently, that all Events are as they *ſhould* be, and upon the whole Account ordered for the *Beſt*: For there is no Poſſibility of *amending* what is done with infinite *Wiſdom*, and *Juſtice*, and *Goodneſs*. And ſecondly, it teaches us that our *Intereſt* does leaſt of all lie in *this* World, where we are but *Strangers* and *Foreigners*, and are to continue but for a *little while*; and that our *Treaſure* and *Inheritance* is in *Heaven*, which is our native Country, and to which e're long we ſhall be recall'd, and our Glory and Happineſs there be the more increas'd, as we have more patiently and contentedly ſubmitted to God's Pleaſure here upon Earth. And a hearty thorough Perſwaſion of theſe two things, will certainly teach a Man *to know*, with St. *Paul*, *How to abound and how to want, and in every Condition to be content.* And for this, Chriſtianity gives the cleareſt *Evidence*, even the Word of God himſelf, *who cannot lye*; as no Man can be to learn that has read the Scriptures.

But

But *Irreligion* on the contrary, is the great *Deſtroyer* of Content, and fills the Soul with continual Vexations, and makes every croſs Accident doubly evil by Impatience. For firſt, the ungodly have not *God in all their Thoughts*, are wholly taken up with *ſecond Cauſes*, and look upon things as the Effect of *Chance* and *Fortune*; and ſo when Croſſes come upon them, or *ill Fortune*, as they call it, they grow querulous and out of all Patience; and as for *divine Providence*, that's wholly unregarded, unleſs it be to *revile* it and impiouſly to call in queſtion the Goodneſs and Juſtice of its Diſpoſals. And ſo, *that* which in Affliction is the greateſt Cordial of all, Irreligion either wholly *deprives* the Soul of, or turns it into Poiſon; and inſtead of *diſarming* a Misfortune by humble Submiſſion to the infinitely wiſe, and juſt, and good Diſpoſals of the great Governour of all things, adds a thouſand ſharper things to it, and makes that become *intolerable*, which Religion would have made to ſit *light* and *eaſy*.

Again, Content is deſtroyed by Irreligion, becauſe it perſwades Men that their whole Intereſt lies here below; either by making them believe there is no ſuch thing as another World, or elſe by engaging them ſo faſt to this, as to hinder their *attending* to any thing beyond this Life: And the Effect of this is great eagerneſs in acquiring theſe lower Goods, impatient Deſires of ſtill more and more of the *World*, as that in which

which is concentred their whole Happiness. And what else can be the Consequence of this amidst the great *uncertainties* that attend these sublunary things, but a World of Trouble and Discontent, answerable to those numerous cross Accidents and Disappointments which every Condition is full of from the highest to the lowest? Every unlucky Hit to such Men is like a Dagger stabbing to the very Heart; for that which a Man looks upon as his *chief Good* he can by no means endure to have lessened and impaired: And the World being so full of such vexatious Mishaps, how full of Wounds must be the Spirit of an ungodly Worldling!

And as *Content*, so *Satisfaction* of Mind, which is much more than a submissive *Acquiescence* in our present Condition, and supposes a Happiness that is *compleat* and *full*. This is a Blessing which nothing but sincere *Religion* can ever make the Soul experience: And he only that has learned to make *God* the chief Object of his Affections and Desires, can indeed know what *Satisfaction* is.

For every thing besides *God* is unsatisfying, because flitting and momentary, and very imperfect, and empty of that infinite Good which is the only adequate Object of that infinite Desire of Happiness which is in the Soul of Man. This is the Reason that Men are so constantly *disappointed* in their Expectation of Happiness from the Enjoyment

ment of this World's Good; let them continually have what they deſire (which yet is too much to be rationally ſuppoſed of any Man) and enjoy it fully and without Controul, yet ſtill there will be ſomething *wanting* to *compleat* their Happineſs, ſomething that they deſire ſtill *further*; and ſo the Soul is continually baulk'd of her Expectation, and ſtill at a Loſs for Happineſs, and continual Longings and Deſires, and as continual Diſappointments, are her Portion in this World. And what's more uneaſie and vexatious than ſuch a Condition as this? What more deplorable than even by Fruition it ſelf to be made unhappy? What other Refuge has the miſerable Soul in this Caſe, than to take off her Affections from theſe empty Nothings here below, and as Religion directs, fix them upon him who is the *ſupreme Good*, and will abide the Teſt of an *eternal* Fruition. In the Enjoyment of *him* muſt needs be *infinite Satisfaction*, becauſe there is no real Good that we can poſſibly *deſire*, but is in the divine Nature in the higheſt Degree of Excellency and Perfection; and that not only for a *Time*, but to all Eternity. All the Capacities of the Soul muſt needs be *fill'd* with an *infinite* Good, and intirely reſt in it as in the very *Center* of Happineſs.

Thirdly, Religion is of very great Value with Reſpect to *this* World, becauſe 'tis ſo greatly conducive to a *long* and *healthy Life* in it.

Long

Long Life and Health is that which all People naturally covet, and is indeed a very great Bleſſing; and that not only becauſe the longer Men live and the more vigorous they are, the longer and more fully they enjoy, or at leaſt *hope* to enjoy the good things of this World (which yet with too many is the main Conſideration) but likewiſe and *chiefly* becauſe they have more Time and greater Opportunities to provide for the Happineſs of the eternal Life to come, and heap up ſtill greater Treaſures of Glory in the Kingdom of Heaven. Now this great Bleſſing nothing is more likely to help a Man to than Religion. For,

Firſt, it engages Men to live regularly and temperately, moderates the Appetites of eating and drinking, and curbs the exorbitant Deſires of the fleſh; and by allowing no more than is neceſſary to the Comfortable Support of Nature, makes no Proviſion for thoſe many deſtructive *Diſeaſes* which are always the Attendants of *Exceſs*. How many of the meaner Sort by *Labour* and *courſe* Fare protract their Days, than of the Rich who live in Eaſe and Luxury? And the Reaſon is plain, becauſe the poor Man's ſcanty Fortune will not allow him to *exceed*, but keeps him within the Bounds of Moderation and Temperance, and forces him to be content with a *little*; whereas the rich have many and great Temptations to Luxury and Exceſs, and ſeldom are ſo religious as to *reſiſt* them, and ſo too frequently

quently feel the ſad *Effects* of Intemperance and live out but half their Days. But now, *Religion* is a kind of *voluntary Poverty*, and helps Men to all the *Bleſſings* of a mean Condition, though rich and out of Danger of the *Sting* of it; and by introducing *Temperance* and *Moderation* into the Families of the wealthy, brings with it Health and long Life, which otherwiſe would ſeldom be found but in the Cottages of the Poor.

Again, Religion is greatly conducive to a long and healthy Life, becauſe it regulates the *Paſſions*, keeps the Soul quiet and in a *Calm*; which has no little Influence upon the Health and Welfare of the Body. That the Paſſions of the Mind do very much affect the Body, is undeniable; and when they are *exceſſive*, nothing more ſhakes and diſcompoſes the whole Man. Even *Joy*, which one would think ſhould be innocent enough, has ſometimes been ſo violent as to overcharge Perſons and leave them dead, and *Grief* has been *often* fatal, and *Envy* is the worſt Sort of Conſumption, and leaves viſible Tokens of it upon the Countenance, and *Love* has had *many* Martyrs, and *Anger* is a great Impoveriſher of the Animal Spirits, and oftentimes makes a Man his own Executioner, and engages in ſuch Scuffles and hot Inconſiderate Actions, as not ſeldom end in *Wounds* and *Death*. Every Exceſs of Paſſion of what kind ſoever, is naturally a great *Impairer* of Health at leaſt, and the often Repetitions of it, the ready Way to *deſtroy* it;

it; Nature not being able to bear ſuch violent Concuſſions long, without being much weaken'd and *ſhatter'd* by them: Like the Walls of a Caſtle, which, how ſtrong ſoever, will receive Damage by every furious Battery, and unleſs reliev'd, muſt at length fall before the Cannons Irreſiſtible Force.

But now, Religion prevents all this Miſchief; and by regulating and reducing to *Moderation* theſe Paſſions of the Soul, makes the Mind calm and quiet, and keeps the Spirits in an *Æquipoiſe*; and the Body conſequently is undiſturb'd, feels no Violence, nor is hurried on to dangerous and deſtructive Actions; but Nature goes on *evenly* in making Proviſion for its Health and Support, and it enjoys its Strength and Beauty as in the Times of Quietneſs and Peace.

In the laſt Place, a comfortable Expectation of a much *better* and *endleſs* Life in the Regions of Glory, can ſpring from nothing but ſincere Religion; and therefore Religion is of very great Value with Reſpect to *this* world. For what can be of greater value and more to be deſired in this Valley of Tears, this World of Sin, and Sorrow, and Ignorance, Vexation, and Diſappointment, than to have a well grounded Hope that 'twill not be *always* ſo with us? That there will be a Time when all Tears ſhall be wip'd from our Eyes, and Sin and Miſery be at an End for ever? That we ſhall one Day be diſentangled from the Clog of Fleſh, the Priſon Doors ſet open, and our captiv'd

captiv'd Souls ſet free, and with Joy unſpeakable and full of Glory, return to the great Father of Spirits, and with the full Vigour of all their Faculties contemplate and enjoy the only ſatisfying Good? That inſtead of Floods of *Tears*, there ſhall then be Rivers of *Pleaſures* flowing in upon us to all Eternity; Halleluia's inſtead of Groans and mournfull Accents; the triumphant Rejoycings of eternal beatified Spirits inſtead of the bitter Complaints of miſerable Mortals; and in a word, *Love* in its Perfection inſtead of Quarrels and Diſcontents, Envy, and Hatred, and Malice, and Revenge, and all the dire Attendants of them? That inſtead of ſpiritual *Blindneſs* and *Ignorance* of the moſt *concerning* Truths (for here we know but in Part, and ſee through a Glaſs darkly) we ſhall e're long, be admitted to contemplate *Truth it ſelf*, and *know as we are known*, and ſhall ſee *God as he is*, and in him all things? For *God is Light*. What can be more valuable than ſuch a chearing Expectation as this! How will it ſweeten all the Troubles of this Mortal Life and be a ſenſible Foretaſte of the Glory that ſhall hereafter be revealed!

But now, nothing can create ſuch a Hope as this but *ſincere Religion*; for God is infinitely *pure and holy*, and into his Preſence no *unclean* thing can enter. And 'tis expreſly ſaid in the Revelations of his Will, *That without Holineſs no Man ſhall ſee the Lord*. A *wicked* Mans Breaſt that is not

ſcared,

feared, can be full of nothing but the dire Reflections of an enrag'd Conscience, and dreadful forebodings of the Wrath to come. The Miseries he feels in *this* World are but as the Beginnings of his *eternal* Sorrows; and while he *continues* in his Rebellion against God, he can expect nothing but new Expresses of his Indignation *here*, and to be doom'd to the Portion of the Devil and his Angels at the Day of Judgment. He only that has liv'd piously in this World can with any Comfort think upon a future State: But to him that has led this *First* Life by the Rule of Religion, and serv'd his Maker in Sincerity of Heart, no Joy comparable to that which he experiences when he thinks of being dissolv'd, and conducted to the Embraces of his Saviour, in the Kingdom of Heaven, where he shall be for ever with him, and unspeakably happy in the Joy of his dear Lord.

And thus much for the Value of Religion with Relation to *this* World. It is the Parent of the most perfect *Peace* and *Quietness*, *Content* and *Satisfaction* of Mind, of a *long* and *healthy* Life here, and of a comfortable Expectation of a glorious Immortality in the Regions of Blessedness. And were this all that could be said of it, I question not but to any considering Man, it would appear to be a *Jewel of inestimable Price*; that nothing the whole World can afford is comparable to it; and that he is the wisest Man, who, with the Merchant in the Parable, immediately

immediately parts with *all* that ſtands in Competition with *Religion*, and would hinder him in the Performance of the Duties of it.

But this is far from *all*; Godlineſs has not only a Promiſe of the Life that *now is*, but alſo, and chiefly of that which is *to come*: And, if it appears to be ſo ineſtimable a Treaſure when we look no further than this Life, what ſhall we think of it when we contemplate that exceeding Weight of Glory which ſhall be its Reward in Heaven!

The Happineſs that will crown Religion in the other World, ſpringing from the ſame Fountain from whence do flow the Felicities of *God himſelf*; (*i. e.*) it conſiſting in an intimate View and full Enjoyment of the Beauties and Perfections of the Divine Nature (for ſo St. *John*, 1 *Joh.* 3. 2. *We ſhall ſee God as he is.*) It muſt needs be *inexpreſſible*: Nay, the very *Contemplation* of it is too bright for Minds darkned with Fleſh, the Splendors of it flaſh too ſtrongly upon our feeble Senſe now we are in the Body, and too long and cloſely gaz'd on will rather *dazle* than *enlighten* our Underſtandings. No *Mortal* Man can *ſee God's Face and live*; and therefore moſt true is that of the Apoſtle, *Eye hath not ſeen, nor Ear heard, neither can it enter into the Heart of Man to conceive the things that God hath reſerv'd for thoſe that love him.* Indeed, this includes all that can poſſibly be imagin'd of Excellence, and 1 Cor. 2. 9.

much more than we poor ignorant *benighted* Creatures can imagin.

For God is the Fountain of Being, and consequently of Perfection: All that is charming and truly desirable in Nature, to our Senses, or to our Understandings, in the visible or invisible Creation; is but a Stream from this divine Fountain, and is in *him* in infinitely greater Excellency. For, he is Beauty, and Goodness, and Harmony *it self*. And therefore, since Religion will bring us to such a Happiness as the Vision and Enjoyment of this *chief Good*; what can compare with it for *Value? The Depth says, 'tis not in me, and the Sea says, 'tis not with me; Man knoweth not the Price thereof, neither is it found in the Land of the Living. It cannot be valued with the Gold of* Ophir, *with the precious* Onyx *or the* Saphire; *no mention shall be made of Coral or Pearls, for the Price of Wisdom is above Rubies*, Job 28.13.&c.

Such then being the Excellency of *Religion*, that it is above all things conducive to the Happiness of Man in *this* World, and will bring him to the Enjoyment of *God himself* to eternal Ages, when this short Life is ended; and the whole that the *World* can afford, amounting to no more, by the Confession of one that enjoy'd it all to the Full, than *Emptiness* and *Disappointment*, *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit* here; and if the Word of God be true, an eternal *Banishment* from the *supreme Good* shall at last be their Punishment, who love this worthless World, more than Religion and their Maker: These

things

things being duly weighed and considered, let any Man in his Wits say, which is of greatest Value, *Religion* or the *World*? And which is the wisest Man, he that ruins his Soul for the Gain of even the whole World, or he that counts all these sublunary things as *Dung* in Comparison with *Religion*, and is ready to part with *all* that this Earth can afford him for the Joys of a good Conscience here, and the Glories of Heaven hereafter? He that prefers the *World* in his Choice, deprives himself of the greatest Comfort of this *present* Life, and parts with the certain Reversion of eternal Happiness in *Heaven*, for Pleasures that don't deserve that Name, they are so *empty* and *unsatisfying*; he brings most exquisite and everlasting Misery upon his *whole* self Soul and Body, for a very short liv'd imperfect Gratification of his *brutal* Part only, and purchases the Torments of the other World by making himself *unhappy in this.*

In a Word therefore, as much as to be like *God* in *Holiness* and *Happiness* is to be preferr'd before being like the *Devil* in *Sin* and *Misery*; as much as *Satisfaction* is better than *Disappointment*, *Peace*, and *Quietness*, and *Content*, than *Vexation* and continual *Disturbance* and *Perplexity* of Mind, a *confirm'd* Health and long Life, than the *Diseases* and *hasty* Death that follows Debauchery, and the comfortable Expectation of being for ever happy with Saints and Angels, and the blessed God in the Cœlestial Para-

diſe, than the confounding Dread of the Judgment of the great Day: As much as Immortality is more to be prized than a Life of a Span long, and the Enjoyment of the *chief Good*, than the Pleaſures of a *Swine*; of ſo much gerater Value is Religion than all that this World can afford, and indeed the only deſirable *Treaſure*, and a *Pearl* of *ineſtimable Price*.

And now, if what has been hitherto diſcours'd be true, the Application is eaſy. If Religion be of all things the moſt precious, let us make it more and more our Endeavour to *inrich* our Souls with this *Treaſure*, to *adorn* our rational Nature with this *Pearl of great Price*; and with the Merchant in the Parable, think nothing too much to part with, that we may purchaſe that Heavenly Wiſdom which will make us wiſe to Salvation. For, *ſound Wiſdom*, as the wiſe King expreſſes it, *is a Tree of Life to thoſe that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that retaineth her. She ſhall give to thine Head an Ornament of Grace, and a Crown of Glory ſhall ſhe deliver to thee.*

Prov. 3. 18.

Prov. 4.9.

But, he that would have this Wiſdom, and find this Pearl, muſt not only *wiſh* and *deſire*, but, with the Merchant in the Parable, diligently *ſeek* it; *ſeek and ye ſhall find*, ſays our Lord; and *Solomon* aſſures us, *That if we ſeek Wiſdom as Silver, and ſearch for her as for hid Treaſure, then ſhall we underſtand the Fear of the Lord, and find the Knowledge of God.*

Pro. 2.4,5.

Religion

Religion is not acquired without *Diligence*; for though it be the Gift of God, yet the Soul muſt be prepared to receive it; all evil Habits muſt be broke and rooted up, and pious Diſpoſitions planted in their Room, and the Temper of the Mind changed by Repentance, and all the Powers of the whole Man become pliable to the Motions of the Spirit of Holineſs before the divine Likeneſs can be formed in the Soul. And though 'tis the Grace of God that enables us to go thus far (for without it we can do *nothing*) yet our own Concurrence and *Co-operation* with his Grace is neceſſary to bring the bleſſed Work of Regeneration to *Perfection*. An obſtinate *Reſiſtance* of preventing Grace will grieve and *quench* that Life-giving Spirit; and ſuch a Soul ſhall know no more of Religion, than that it was invited to it, but rejected the Offer, and *might* have been happy in the Enjoyment of ſo great a Treaſure, but it *would* not. But, when a Soul with *Joy* embraces the Motions of the holy Spirit to a new Life, and makes it her great Endeavour to remove all Obſtacles out of the Way, that they may make a due *Impreſſion*, and hungers and thirſts after *new* Degrees of Righteouſneſs; This Soul ſhall be *fill'd* with the Treaſures of the divine Grace, and the Power of Godlineſs will be viſible in all Manner of holy Converſation. But this can't be perform'd without a *watchful perſevering Diligence*; there is ſo much Oppoſition from within and

without to this great Business, that like *Ne-*
Neh. 5. 17. *hemiah's* Labourers, we must work with our *Swords in our Hands*, and fight and strive, that we may carry on the Building of a living Temple for our God, and make our Souls Houses of Prayer, adorn'd with religious Affections, and fit to receive him that hates Iniquity. He that is thus diligent shall grow *rich towards God*, and daily increase in the Knowledge and Love of him, 'till Mortality shall be swallow'd up of Life; and then all the *Labours* of Religion shall for ever be at an End, and nothing remain for the happy Soul to do but to enjoy to all Eternity the glorious *Rewards* of it.

Let us all therefore be *stedfast unmoveable, and always abound in the Work of the Lord, for as much as we know our Labour shall not be in vain*; and to our diligent Pursuit of this inestimable Treasure of Religion, let us add frequent and earnest Prayer to God, who is the only Giver of every good and perfect Gift, that he would send down Wisdom from his holy Heaven, that being present, she may labour with us, that we may know what is pleasing in his Sight, and set our selves to do it with all Alacrity, running with Diligence and Patience the *Race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our Faith; who for the Joy that was set before him, endur'd the Cross, despising the Shame, and is set down at the*
Heb. 12. 1, 2. *Right Hand of the Throne of God.* remembring that *we* also shall *reap in due Season if we*

we faint not: And if we part with all the vile *Affections* for the Sake of Religion in this World, and are ready in Preparation of Mind to ſuffer any worldly Loſs, even to that of Life it ſelf for the Sake of Jeſus and his Truth; we ſhall find ſuch a Recompence of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven, as will abundantly compenſate all our Sufferings here; *for our light Affliction which is but for a Moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory.*

Happy is the Exchange of *all* that this World can afford for a Jewel of ſo great Price as *Religion*, and for ſuch inexhauſtible Treaſures of Bliſs as are reſerved to *Reward* it in the Preſence of God. What is our greateſt Intereſt therefore let us before all things perſue, and where our *Treaſure is, there let our Hearts be alſo.*

The PRAYER.

I.

O Mercifull Jeſu! Who haſt prepared for us a Treaſure in Heaven, and taught us the Way to attain it, and warn'd us of the Emptineſs of this World's Good, that we may not be allur'd by its Temptations to leave the Way to Life; enable me I intreat thee ſo ſtedfaſtly to attend thy divine Inſtructions, that I may more and more daily take

my Love from that which does not, cannot satisfy, and is indeed but Vanity and Vexation of Spirit, and fix it upon that which is above all things valuable: That so, I may be convinc'd by a happpy Experience, that true Pleasure, and Freedom, and Happiness, is only to be met with in thy Service; and that I am so little design'd for the Delights of the World and of Sense, that the longer I live to prove them, the less capable I shall be of their Enjoyment. O may that Peace and Tranquillity within my own Breast, that Quiet with others, that Health and Length of Days which is in the Right Hand of Religion, and the durable Riches and true Honour that is in her Left, and that chearing Expectation of Heaven when this frail Tabernacle shall be dissolv'd; may this which is the natural Offspring of true Piety leave so lovely an Idea of it upon my Soul, that I may value it as indeed the greatest Treasure, and a Pearl of inestimable Price! And may I be so wise, as where my Treasure is, there to fix my Desires, and thither to direct my Endeavours, and part with every thing that is my Hindrance in the Acquisition of it! And since this Pearl is not cast before Swine, and this Treasure must be diligently sought for e're it be found: Do thou so purify and refine my Affections, that I may above all things, hunger and thirst after Righteousness, and diligently search for this saving Wisdom as for hid Treasure; and may thy blessed Spirit, which leadeth

in-

into all Truth, ſo guide and direct me in my Search, that ſeeking I may find, and having found, never more part with that ineſtimable Jewel, though for the Gain of the whole World, but rather ſell all, even Life it ſelf to ſecure my Poſſeſſion of it. And this Wiſdom I earneſtly beg of thee O Lord, who art the Giver of every good and perfect Gift, through the Merits of Jeſus thy beloved Son, our only Saviour. Amen.

PARABLE

PARABLE IV.

Of a merciful King, *and his* unmerciful Servant.

Matth. xviii. 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35.

The Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a certain King, which would take Account of his Servants.

And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him Ten Thouſand Talents.

But foraſmuch as he had not to pay, his Lord commanded him to be ſold, and his Wife and Children, and all that he had, and Payment to be made.

The Servant therefore fell down and worſhipped him, ſaying, Lord have Patience with me and I will pay thee all.

Then the Lord of that Servant was moved with Compaſſion, and looſed him, and forgave him the Debt.

But the ſame Servant went out, and found one

one of his Fellow-Servants which ought him an Hundred Pence: And he laid hands on him and took him by the Throat, ſaying, pay me that thou oweſt.

And his Fellow-Servant fell down at his Feet, ſaying, have Patience with me and I will pay thee all.

And he would not; but went and caſt him into Priſon, till he ſhould pay the Debt.

So when his Fellow-Servants ſaw what was done, they were very ſorry, and came and told unto their Lord all that was done.

Then his Lord, after that he had called him, ſaid unto him, O thou wicked Servant, I forgave thee all that Debt becauſe thou deſiredſt me:

Shouldſt not thou alſo have Compaſſion of thy Fellow-Servant, even as I had Pity on thee?

And his Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the Tormentors, till he ſhould pay all that was due unto him.

So alſo ſhall my heavenly Father do alſo unto you, if ye from your Hearts forgive not everyone his Brother their Treſpaſſes.

THIS Parable was ſpoken upon St. *Peter's* asking our Lord, *how often ſhall my Brother ſin againſt me and I forgive him? Till Seven Times?* Verſ. 21.

To which Queſtion the compaſſionate Jeſus firſt anſwers *directly, I ſay not unto thee till* Verſ.

Seven

Seven Times, but till Seventy Times Seven: And then *illustrates* that his Answer, and shews how great *Obligation* we have to *forgive Injuries*, and how sad will be our *Punishment* if we do not; in the Parable above written. In which Parable, there are two things in *general* to be considered.

First, The mercifull *Example* of God's Dealing with us miserable Sinners, who lay under a vast Debt to his Justice; expres'd by a King's taking Account of his Servants, *&c.* and forgiving, *&c.*

Secondly, His great *Displeasure* against those that will not *imitate* that his compassionate Example, in *forgiving* such as have been *injurious* to *them*, expres'd by the King's being wroth with his unmerciful Servant, who, though he receiv'd so much Kindness himself, would shew none to his Fellow-Servant who owed him a Trifle in Comparison; but, without the least Compassion, threw him into Prison till he should pay it; upon which his Lord *delivered him over to the Tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.*

Under The *first* General, there are three *Particulars* to be considered.

First, the Greatness of the Debt which by Sin we have contracted to the Divine Justice, expressed by *Ten Thousand Talents.*

Secondly, The Impossibility of *our* ever *clearing* this Debt, and the sad Consequence if it still should have remain'd upon Account; expres'd here by the King's Debtor *having*

having nothing to pay, and the King's commanding that therefore *he ſhould be ſold, and his Wife, and Children, and all that he had*, that ſo Payment might be made.

Thirdly, The wondrous *Compaſſion* of our good God, in *pitying* our miſerable Condition, and *forgiving* us all our Debt; expreſſed by that King's being mov'd with Compaſſion at the deplorable Condition of his inſolvent Servant, and *looſing him and forgiving him the Debt*.

Under the *ſecond* General there are likewiſe three *Particulars* to be conſider'd.

Firſt, What it is to forgive one another as God for Chriſt's ſake hath forgiven us, and the great Obligation we have to imitate this Example of our merciful God.

Secondly, Our great *Baſeneſs* if we do not; and

Thirdly, The miſerable *Conſequence* that will attend that Baſeneſs, we ſhall provoke God to *recall* his Pardon to *us*, and *be deliver'd over to the Tormentors till we ſhall pay all that is due unto him*.

The firſt *General* to be conſider'd in this Parable, is God's *Example* in dealing with us miſerable Sinners, who lay under a *vaſt Debt* to his *Juſtice*; expreſs'd by a *King's taking Account of his Servants*, and freely *forgiving one that was deeply indebted to him*. And the firſt *Particular* to be conſider'd under it, is, the *Greatneſs* of the *Debt*, which by *Sin* we have contracted to the Divine *Juſtice*.

By

By contracting a Debt to the Divine Justice is meant the having *violated* the just and holy *Laws* of *God*, and thereby becoming *obnoxious* to his *just Anger*, unless we satisfie his Justice some other Way. As a *convict* Criminal, we say, has not *satisfyed*, or is *indebted* to the *Law*, till he has suffered the *Punishment* for his Crime which the Law thinks fit to *inflict*; or else finds Favour and has it *remitted* him.

As for the *Greatness* of the Debt which Mankind by his Sin has thus contracted to the divine Justice, 'tis express'd in this Parable by *ten thousand Talents*; which, according to our Way of Reckoning, is above
50,000 a *Million of Pounds*. A vast Sum this, but yet far short of what we owe to the Justice of God by Reason of our Iniquities; which are, not only *Millions*, but *Innumerable*, even *as the Stars in Heaven*, and *the Sand upon the Sea-Shore*: Nor are they only *numberless*, but very *great*; not only many *Thousands*, but many Thousands of *Talents*. Every *Sin*, as 'tis a wilfull Violation of the Laws of God, has Weight enough (*if God should be extreme to mark what is done amiss*) to sink a Soul into eternal Ruin: And the Reason is because *God's* is the *highest Authority*, and his *Laws* most *just* and *equal*, and we have an *infinite* Obligation to *obey* him, both as his *Creatures* and *Dependents*, who *live* by his *Favour* and Bounty, and have received numberless and inestimable Blessings from him; and likewise as *rational* Creatures, that

that we may *perfect* our *own Nature*, by the Practice of thoſe Virtues which will *conform* us to the *Image* and Likeneſs of *God* himſelf. And therefore, *Sin* being an *Oppoſition* to the *higheſt Authority*, a Violation of the *beſt* Laws, a Breaking through the *ſtricteſt* Bonds, thoſe of *Submiſſion* to the Author of our *Being*, and of *Gratitude* to the Giver of *all the Bleſſings* we enjoy; and likewiſe of *Self-Love* and *Preſervation*, in rejecting the Means of advancing our own Nature to the *Similitude* and *Enjoyment* of *God*, which is our *chief Happineſs*: *Sin* being *all this*, muſt needs be *exceeding ſinful*, and indeed the *greateſt Evil*, and in no caſe *eligible*. And therefore, the oftner 'tis *repeated*, and the more of *Choice* there is in the Commiſſion of it, and the more *heinous* the Inſtances of it are, and the greater *Obligations* Men are under by Reaſon of God's *Bounty* and *Goodneſs* to them (whether as to natural or ſpiritual Endowments) to *ſerve* and *obey* him; the *higher*, proportionably riſes the *Guilt* of *Sin*. And he that *often* and *wilfully* commits *great* Impieties, notwithſtanding *infinite Obligations* to the contrary (which *was* and *is* the Caſe of every *Sinner*) is indebted to God's Juſtice, not only *Ten Thouſand Talents*, but Ten Thouſand *Millions* of Talents; *i. e.* his Debt is *infinite*, and unleſs ſome Miracle of *Mercy* intervene, the divine Juſtice cannot be ſatisfyed but by his undergoing an *infinite Puniſhment*. And all the World muſt acknowledge

ledge it *just*, that *Sin* being the *greatest possible Evil*, should be repay'd with the greatest *Possible*; that is, *eternal Punishment*.

So *vast* a Debt then, lying upon all Mankind by reason of their Sins; it is most true in the

Second Place, That 'twas utterly impossible for them of *themselves* ever to *clear* this Debt, and make Satisfaction to the divine Justice; and the sad Consequence, should it have still remain'd upon *Account*, would have been no less than *eternal Misery*. Which is represented very *lively* in the Parable, by the King's Debtor having *nothing to pay*, and the King thereupon commanding *that he should be sold, and his Wife, and Children, and all that he had, and Payment made*. Ac-
2 Kin. 4. 1. cording to the Custom of the *Jews* in so using Debtors that were not able to pay.

'Tis utterly impossible for Mankind of *themselves* ever to have paid this vast Debt, because *every* individual meer Man is deeply engaged and always will be so in the same Account; so *deeply*, that he can never clear *himself*, much less make Satisfaction for *others*: Nor is there any thing valuable enough in all the Treasures of Nature to buy off this Sentence, *just*, though *sad*, *The Soul that sinneth it shall die*. *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord*, says the Prophet *Micah*,
Mic. 6. 6. when he had a Controversy with the People for their Sins, *and wherewith shall I bow my self before the high God? Shall I come before him with Burnt Offerings, with Calves of a Year*

Year old; will the Lord be pleaſed with Thouſands of Rams or Ten Thouſands of Rivers of Oil? Shall I give my Firſt-born for my Tranſgreſſion, the Fruit of my Body for the Sin of my Soul? As if he had ſaid, what's all this to him that is the Creator of every thing, the Lord and great Proprietor of all already; and whoſe Glory and Happineſs is infinitely above even *our* moſt exalted Thoughts and Conceptions? He is an Ideot that does not confeſs that all the Riches of the Univerſe are utterly inſufficient, as the Pſalmiſt expreſſes it, to *redeem the forfeited Souls of Mankind, ſo that that muſt be let alone for ever*: All therefore that is in Man to give being, far from ſufficient to commute for the Puniſhment his Sins has deſerv'd; God's Juſtice muſt be ſatisfyed by his *undergoing* that Puniſhment; that is, eternal Death; for ever *dying* yet never *dead, extremely* miſerable and *for ever* ſo. A Puniſhment ſo inexpreſſibly great, that *Annihilation* is much to be preferr'd before it; for who can dwell with *everlaſting Burnings!* Who can bear an *eternal Baniſhment* from the *ſupreme Good*, and Confinement to the dire Abodes of the Devil and his Angels, thoſe mercileſs Executioners of the divine Juſtice, who will exact the Pains we are to ſuffer with the utmoſt Cruelty! Who can bear the *Gnawings* of that never dying Worm, Remorſe of Conſcience, for *forfeiting* ſuch infinite *Happineſs*, and plunging our ſelves headlong in ſuch a *bottomleſs Miſery*, and that for the Sake of

what was always *empty* and *unsatisfying*, even when we did *enjoy it*! And who can bear the Horrors of *Despair* of ever seeing an *End* of such Torments as these, which yet might have been intirely avoided if we would! *This* is *indeed* an unconceivably *miserable* Condition, and all Men that ever lived must have been involv'd in it, had not the *Wisdom* and the *Goodness* of *God* found out a Means both to satisfie his *Justice*, and at the same Time to be *merciful* to his miserable Creatures: To *forgive* the Debt to those that had nothing to pay, and yet to have full *Satisfaction* made him for it. 'Tis what could never have enter'd into the Heart of *Man* to *conceive*; 'tis the great *Mystery* of divine *Love*, which even the Angels desire to look into, and 'tis that which is and shall be the Subject of eternal Hallelujah's in Heaven.

Thirdly therefore, let us consider the wondrous *Compassion* of our good God, in pitying our sadly deplorable Condition, and *forgiving* us all that Debt which we could never have *paid*, though we had *suffer'd* the Pains of Hell, for *those* shall never have an *End*; and this is express'd in the Parable by the King's being mov'd with Compassion at the miserable Condition of his *insolvent* Servant, *and loosing him and forgiving him the Debt*.

The King in the Parable was very merciful, who, upon the *humble Entreaty* of his poor Servant, and his Promise if he would have

have Patience with him at length to *pay him all*, was moved to Compassion and forgave him: But *God* is infinitely *more* merciful in compassionating *our* Condition, and forgiving *our* great Debt, as will appear from the following Considerations.

For First, *our* Debt is infinitely greater. Ten Thousand Talents, in Comparison of the *numberless* Number of the heinous Sins of Mankind, are but as the Sand of an *Hour-Glass*, compar'd with that of the *Sea-Shore*; and *one wilful* Violation of *our* Obedience to *God*, is a *far weightier* Debt to the divine *Justice*, than Millions of Talents would be from one *Mortal* to *another*. And the Reason is plain, because the *Distance* between God and Man is *infinite*; and for a *Beggar* to spurn at a *Prince*, is certainly a Crime of much higher Aggravation, than to do the like to one of his own ragged Gang.

All that is culpable (as was said) is met together in a *wilful Sin*; and therefore infinite and amazingly great must be the Guilt of all *Mankind*, who have heap'd up Transgressions without Number; and have *no Way* left of *paying* this great Debt, but by suffering without End the *Pains of Hell*. And such a dreadful Punishment as this, being annex'd to Sin by him who is infinitely *good* and *just*; is Argument sufficient, that there is no Debt comparable to that which a guilty *Sinner* owes to the Justice of God. And therefore, when God gives *Mercy*, so *great* an Exaltation as to forgive so *vast* a

Debt as *this*; 'tis Compaſſion impoſſible to be paralleſ'd.

Secondly, God's Compaſſion in forgiving *us* is infinitely greater than that good King's in the Parable, becauſe we leſs *deſerve* *God*'s Favour than that poor Servant did his *Lord*'s. *He acknowledg'd* his Debt, and was *griev'd* for his not being able to diſcharge it and humbly *ſubmitted* himſelf to his offended Lord; but 'tis quite otherwiſe with *us*, *we* add *Obſtinacy* and *Pride* to our long Score, are ſtill in actual Rebellion againſt God, and daily more and more provoke him by *new* Impieties: *We* make what Haſte we can, as the Prophet expreſſes it, to *fill up* the Meaſure of our *Fathers* Iniquities and our *own*, rather than by *Repentance* and *better* Life to *leſſen* the great Account that is againſt us.

And this is to enflame God's *Anger* rather than to move his *Compaſſion*, and does indeed deſerve *quick Vengeance* rather than *Forgiveneſs*. And yet, ſo boundleſs an Ocean is the *divine Goodneſs*, even in this *rebellious* State *God* pities his poor unhappy Creatures, *and is full of Compaſſion, long-ſuffering, and of great Kindneſs, and repenteth him of the Evil*; and when we deſerve nothing but the *ſevereſt* Puniſhment, thinketh upon *Mercy* and *forgiveneſs*; and propoſes very eaſie Conditions of Reconciliation and Readmittance to his Favour, and even *courts* us to accept them: *Turn ye, turn ye from your evil Ways, for why will ye dye O Houſe of Iſrael!*

Now

Now for the great and infinitely *happy God*, to treat ſuch *hardned Rebels* at ſo tender and compaſſionate a rate; to be ſo ready to forgive thoſe who not at all *deſerve* it, but rather the utmoſt Expreſſes of his *Vengeance*; is doubtleſs a Mercy *infinite* and beyond Compariſon.

Thirdly, The poor Debtor in the Parable, *humbly beſought* his Lord's Pity and Forbearance, he fell down on his Face and worſhipped him, and by that his *humble Behaviour* and *earneſt Intreaty*, inclin'd his Lord to commiſerate his ſad Condition. But inſtead of this, *we* are not ſo *little* ſenſible of, or afflicted with *any* thing, as that great Debt we owe to the divine Juſtice. So *far* from paſſionately *begging* for our Pardon, that we ſpend but very few *Thoughts* about it, and *moſt* of us are very *little*, and ſome not *at all apprehenſive* of the Need we have of being again receiv'd into God's Favour, and the ſad Conſequence if we are *not*: And are far more ſollicitous about *promoting* ſome *petty* Intereſt in *this* World, than about the *Pardon of our Sins*, which is the One Thing neceſſary in Order to our Eſcape from *Hell*.

And this is ſo great a *ſlighting* and *undervaluing* God's Forgiveneſs, expreſſes ſo much *Indifferency* whether he does it or no; that one would think it ſhould be enough to provoke God to *reſolve* the *Deſtruction*, and ſwear in his Wrath that they ſhall never enter into his Reſt.

And yet, ſo wondrouſly compaſſionate is our good God, *unſought* to, *undeſired*, he of his own meer *Tenderneſs*, intirely forgave the *paſt* Offences of his thoughtleſs Creatures, and for the *Future* ſtill promis'd Forgiveneſs to ſuch as ſhould offend anew, upon this only *eaſie* Condition, that they ſhould no more *wilfully* break his holy Laws, and immediately *repent* when through *Surprize* or *Inadvertency* or the Force of *Temptation* they ſhould do amiſs. And to be thus merciful notwithſtanding ſo much Provocation to the contrary, is Compaſſion that has no Parallel.

Fourthly, God's Goodneſs in pitying and forgiving *Sinners*, is infinitely greater than that of the King in the Parable in forgiving his poor Debtor; becauſe the *Miſery Mankind* is delivered from by this Mercy of *God*, is infinitely *greater*, than *that* which the poor *Wretch* in the *Goſpel eſcap'd* by the Compaſſion of *his Lord*.

His Puniſhment, had his Lord dealt *rigorouſly* with him, would have been, that he ſhould be ſold, and his Wife, and Children, and all that he had, that ſo, in ſome Meaſure at leaſt Payment might be made; and the *utmoſt* that this could amount to was *Poverty* and *Slavery*, both of *himſelf* and all his *Family*, all the Days of his Life: Which though indeed a very *ſad* Condition, and ſuch as no Submiſſion could be too great, no Entreaties too earneſt to *avoid*; yet certainly, comes infinitely ſhort of theſe *eternal* Miſeries

Miſeries in the Regions of Darkneſs, and in the Society of the Devil and his Angels, which would have been the Portion of the *whole Race of Mankind*, had not God's merciful Forgiveneſs prevented it, and given us better Hopes.

Now the greater the *Neceſſity*, the greater the *Charity* that *relieves* it; the greater and more *general* the *Danger*, the more valuable the *Reſcue*; the more extreme the Miſery, and the greater the Number of thoſe that were condemn'd to ſuffer it, the greater the Compaſſion that relents and delivers from it. It being therefore abſolutely *neceſſary* that God ſhould *pardon* Sinners, that they might eſcape the Puniſhment due to Sin (for they had nothing to pay) and the Danger of thoſe Puniſhments being *imminent*, the Meaſures of Men's Iniquities riſing to ſo *great a Height*; and the Miſery that would have involv'd all Man-kind, had God's Vengeance had its free Courſe, and Sin its due Reward, being no leſs than that of *Hell*, and that for *ever* too: That Compaſſion of God that inclin'd him to forgive ſo *many* wretched Debtors as the *whole Race of Man-kind*, and prevented ſuch otherwiſe *unavoidable*, *endleſs* and *unconceivable Miſery*; was certainly *infinite Compaſſion*, wonderfully great and beyond Compariſon.

Fifthly, The *Conſequence* of God's forgiving Sinners is infinitely *happier* than that of the Forgiveneſs of the poor Debtor in the Parable.

He, after his Lord's looſing and forgiving him, was out of Fear indeed of that ſad Miſfortune which otherwiſe muſt have faln upon him; he enjoy'd his Liberty, and that of his Wife and Children, and continu'd ſtill in Poſſeſſion of what he had, 'till he forfeited all again by his Cruelty to his Fellow-Servant, which was no mean Comfort; but then this was all: We read of no *new* Favours conferr'd upon him, or that he was entruſted with any more of his Lord's Revenue, or the like.

But now, the compaſſionate *God*, has to *Forgiveneſs* of Sinners, added innumerable and ineſtimable *Favours*; dignifi'd them with the Title of his *Sons*, communicated to them freſh Aſſiſtances of his bleſſed Spirit to help and guide them in the Way to Happineſs; and promiſed them Crowns of eternal Glory, and everlaſting Inheritances in Heaven, and an intimate Viſion and Enjoyment of *himſelf* (who is the Center of Felicity) provided they continue ſincerely obedient to him for the Time to come. There is no Happineſs which a rational Creature is *capable* of, but God, in his infinite Mercy freely and bountifully confers upon Man-kind, now that his Compaſſions have reconciled them to him; and in the Words of St. *Paul*, *He gives us richly all things to enjoy*.

1 Tim. 6. 17.

And for God, not only to *forgive* obſtinate Rebels againſt his divine Government; to paſs by their vile *Ingratitude* to *him* their greateſt Benefactor, and baſe Abuſe of his

Bleſſings

Bleſſings to his Diſhonour; but to confer upon 'em *Favours* of the greateſt Value, to receive 'em into his own *Boſom*, and make 'em Coheirs with his eternal Son, and advance 'em to his heavenly Kingdom: This is ſuch an admirable Expreſſion of the divine Goodneſs and Love of Mankind, as could never proceed from any other but him who is *Goodneſs it ſelf*.

In the laſt Place, that which exalts the Compaſſion of God to the higheſt Degree, and makes it indeed *miraculous*, is the amazing Courſe he took thus to ſhew *Mercy* in the *Pardon* of Sinners, and yet *ſatisfie his Juſtice* too.

The King in the Parable was at Liberty to diſpoſe of his *own* as he pleaſed, and he might have forgiven, without further Regard to any thing of *Juſtice* in that Caſe, a *greater* Debt if it had been owing to him: But in the Caſe of God's forgiving *Sinners*, it was otherwiſe. God had before ſolemnly declar'd to our firſt Parents, and very often afterwards, that *the Soul that ſinned it ſhould die*; and his Juſtice was concern'd to ſee that Sentence executed; and in the Nature of the thing likewiſe 'twas perfectly *juſt* that the Violaters of God's holy and good Commands, ungrateful Rebels againſt their *Creator* and greateſt *Benefactor*, ſhould receive a due Recompence for their Wickedneſs.

Now *Juſtice* is as eſſential to *God* as *Mercy*; and though his infinite *Goodneſs* mov'd him

him to have *Compassion* upon Sinners, yet his *Justice* pleaded for their *Punishment*; Mercy would *remit* the Debt, but *Justice* required *Satisfaction*. A Difficulty this, which *mortal* Wit could never solve. But God, who is infinitely *wise* as well as *good* and just, that the Work of his Hands might not perish, nor his Image and Likeness be for ever miserable, and that his *Justice* likewise might be fully *satisfyed*; contriv'd a wondrous Way for the Redemption of Sinners, by freely forgiving 'em their vast Debt, and yet making full Satisfaction to his *Justice* for the Sins of the whole World. And that was, by the Incarnation of his blessed Son, and substituting him in our stead, to suffer, as the Representative of Mankind, the Punishment due to their Iniquities, and by his spotless Blood to make an universal Attonement, and through the Merit of that his *precious Sacrifice* (for what's above the Merit of the Blood of the Son of God?) To purchase for them *Pardon* and Forgiveness, the Love and Favour of God in this World, and the eternal Enjoyment of him in the next. And by this means, as the Apostle expresses it, *to declare his Righteousnes, that* Rom. 3. 26. *he might be just; and the Justifyer* likewise *of him that believeth in Jesus.*

Thus *Mercy* and *Truth* are miraculously met together, and *Righteousness* and *Peace* have kiss'd each other. And for ever blessed be that infinitely *wise* and *just Compassion*, which in so wondrous a Manner contriv'd the

the *Forgiveneſs of our vaſt Debt*, and the *Satisfaction* of the divine *Juſtice* too! What Love can be greater than this, that God ſhould ſend his eternal Son into the World to be the Propitiation for Sinners! And that while we were *Enemies*, Chriſt ſhould dye for us, and bear our Sins in his own Body on the Tree, that through his Stripes we might be healed! *Wonderful art thou, O Lord, in thy Doings towards the Children of Men, and thy Mercy is over all thy Works!* And O that our Hearts might be warm'd with the ſame divine Flame, and *we might love much, to whom ſo much hath been forgiven!*

And thus much for the firſt thing to be conſidered in this Parable; namely, the glorious Example of Forgiveneſs that God has ſet us, in his dealing thus mercifully with us miſerable Sinners who lay under a vaſt Debt to the divine Juſtice, and had nothing to pay; and how infinitely this Compaſſion of God to Sinners exceeds the greateſt and moſt generous Expreſſion of Forgiveneſs, that can be ſhewn by one Man to another. 'Tis greater than the King's forgiving Ten Thouſand Talents to his poor Servant in the Parable, becauſe he entreated him and had nothing to pay.

I proceed now, to the *ſecond* General to be conſider'd in this Parable, which is, God's great Diſpleaſure againſt thoſe that will not *imitate* this his compaſſionate Example, in forgiving ſuch as have been injurious to *them*; but like that wicked Servant to whom the

the King had been so *gracious*, rigidly requiring full Satisfaction for little *Trifles* and *Punctilios*. As he, no sooner out of the Presence of his compassionate Lord, *but took his Fellow-Servant by the Throat, who ow'd him an Hundred Pence*, and though intreated to have Patience, as earnestly as he had but just before intreated his offended Lord, yet without the least Pity, threw him into Prison till he should pay the Debt. The *Consequence* of such a *revengeful* Temper will be like that of this cruel Servant, who was not only severely *rebuked* for his Wickedness, but had the Pardon his Lord gave him *recalled*, and *was deliver'd over to the Tormentors till he should pay the uttermost Farthing. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do unto you*, says our Lord, *if ye from your Hearts forgive not every one his Brother their Trespasses*. And under this General there are likewise, as was said, Three Particulars to be considered.

First, What it is to forgive one another, *as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us*; and the great *Obligation* we have to imitate this Example of our merciful God. To forgive one another in Imitation of the Divine Example, is *first* to forgive such as have injured us, *freely* and without *Reserve*; and that though they still continue to shew themselves our Enemies, and are ready to do us fresh Mischiefs when it lies in their Power. For *thus*, as we have seen, *God* dealt with us miserable *Sinners*; *he first lov'd us*, and while

while we were yet *Sinners*, and conſequently in open Hoſtility and Rebellion againſt him, even when he ſent his Son to dye for us, and be the Propitiation for our Sins: He took pity upon us when we were ſtill adding new Wickedneſſes to our long Account, and when we *deſerved* nothing but eternal *Miſery*, thought upon *Mercy*.

And in Imitation of this, our Lord commands us to love our *Enemies*; not to render *Evil* for *Evil*, but contrariwiſe *Bleſſing*; *that ſo we may be the Children of our Father which is in Heaven.* For, to uſe our Saviours Enforcement of this; if thoſe only ſhare in our Affections or Eſteem, who are as beneficial and kind to us as we to them, what Thank have we? Self-Love and Intereſt may there be the Motives, and very little of True Piety and Goodneſs; nay, even the very worſt of Men may be as eminent for ſuch Sort of Charity as the beſt, Publicans and Sinners, as our Lord obſerved, doing the ſame. But *Chriſtians* ſhould be of a more *Godlike* Temper, their Charity more free and diſintereſſed; the greater and more frequent *their* Injuries, the more ready ſhould they be to pardon and *forgive*; and not only be reconciled after a *ſeven-fold* Wrong, but after one repeated *ſeventy times ſeven.* And our Saviour has likewiſe further inforced this by his *own* Example, who with his laſt Breath pray'd for the Forgiveneſs of his *cruel Murtherers.*

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Secondly, We must not only forgive such as but little *deserve* it, but likewise, in Correspondence to our *divine Pattern*, whether they *desire* it or no: For thus it was in God's Forgiveness of Sinners, he *prevented* us by the Riches of his compassionate Goodness, and entreated us his rebellious Creatures, first by his Prophets, then by his only Son, to be reconcil'd to him, and embrace their Pardon. And thus, *those that will be Imitators of God as dear Children*, must likewise do. Rather than Enmity should continue we must *seek* to our Enemies to be reconcil'd, though they were the first that *offered* the Offence. And this, however hardly it may sound, is not only our Duty, by Vertue of that *general* Co[illegible]d of forgiving one another *as God has forgiven us*, but is expressly commanded by our compassionate Saviour, *Mat.* 18.15. (which occasion'd that Question of St. *Peter*, *Vers.* 21. *How often shall I forgive my Brother?* Upon which our Lord deliver'd this Parable) his Words are these, and deserve our serious Attention. *Moreover, if thy Brother* trespass against thee, go and tell him his Fault *between thee and him alone. If thy Brother trespass against thee*, or as we usually express it, *first* did the Injury, or *gave* the Affront, *go thou to him*; stay not till *he* comes and *acknowledges* his Fault to *thee*, for that's a thing Men are very backward in doing, either for *fear* or for *Shame*, or out of *Pride* and *Greatness of Spirit*, as it must be term'd, or for other Reasons;

sons; and *Time* usually *widens* such Breaches, and encreases *Strangeness* and *Aversion*: But go thou therefore to *him* in Meekness and the Spirit of *Forgiveness*, and with Resolutions of passing by all further Unkindness, and it may be *reproaches* for your good Will, calmly tell him his Fault, expostulate the Case with him, and in all Likelyhood he *will hear thee*, a right Understanding between you will ensue, and thou shalt gain thy Brother. This is indeed to be like God in this great Excellence of forgiving Injuries, and is, as a most noble Expression of christian Charity, so we see very plainly commanded by our Lord, and should be taken into our serious Consideration in order to our agreeable *Practice*.

Thirdly, We must not only so far forgive as not to *revenge*, but in Imitation of the *divine* Pattern of Forgiveness set before us, be ready to do all Acts of *Kindness*, and *Beneficence* to our Enemy, as *Occasion* shall serve, and his *Needs* require: Remembring the Words of our great Master, *Do good to them that hate you, and pray for those that despightfully use you and persecute you, for so shall ye be the Children of the Highest, who is kind to the unthankful and to the evil.* And we must endeavour to confirm the new made Agreement, by more than ordinary Expressions of good Will, that we may heap Coals upon our Enemies Head to melt him into a Correspondent Charity; and likewise that there may be no Place left for our Enemy or

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our selves to *doubt* the *Sincerity* of our Forgiveness. For the *smoothest Words* may be rotten and deceitful, and the not *revenging* an Injury may be for want of *Power* or *Opportunity*; but when to good Words *beneficial Actions* are added, then may a Man well be thought to love and forgive, not in *Word* only, *but in Deed and in Truth.*

This is *Christian* Forgiveness of Injuries,
Ephes. 4. ult. or, in the Apostle's Words, *the forgiving one another if any have a Quarrel against any, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us*: i. e. *freely* and *intirely*, though their Malice *still continues* against us; nay, to *go* and *offer* 'em Forgiveness and Reconciliation tho' they neither *desire* nor *deserve* it, and to accompany our Forgiveness with Acts of *Kindness* and *good Turns.*

But what has been said upon this Account must have a *Limitation*; lest it bound indiscriminately upon *all Men* and at *all Times*, that is, in *all* Instances of Wrong, it thwart and run Counter to other Duties of our holy Religion. Now in order to our being inform'd of the just Limits of this great Duty, we must consider that Injuries may be of three Sorts; affecting either Men's *Persons*, their *good Names*, or their *Estates*: And each of these may be either in Danger of *Ruin* by the Injuries of a wicked Man, or only greatly *damag'd*; or the Injury may be but *small* and *trifling*, and such as brings no *considerable* and *lasting* Ill Effects along with it. Now such Injuries as threaten

en *Ruin* to a Man in any of thoſe Reſpects, ought not to be ſilently let paſs, nor the Man *ſo* forgiven as to have no Notice taken of him; and ſuch a legal *Proſecution* of him as is neceſſary to *ſecure* a Man's *Perſon*, or to *vindicate* or recover his blaſted *Reputation*, and to preſerve his *Eſtate*, all or either of which would be *ruin'd* by the injurious Perſon if tamely let alone; a legal *Proſecution* in ſuch Caſes as theſe, is allow'd by the Law of *God* and *Nature* as well as *that* of the *Land*. And the Caſe is proportionably the ſame as to Injuries that *greatly endamage* a Man in any of thoſe Reſpects before mentioned: And were *all* Wrongs, how great ſoever, to be ſubmitted to and put up in Silence by Chriſtians, by Vertue of the Command of forgiving Injuries; 'twould be to betray the Sheep to the Wolves, to expoſe the Diſciples of Chriſt to the Malice of all the wicked World; which is not conſiſtent with the *Wiſdom* and *Goodneſs* of the great Shepherd of the Sheep, Chriſt Jeſus. And St. *Paul* ſays expreſly, *He that provideth not for his own Houſe, i. e.* for the comfortable Subſiſtence of his Family, *has deny'd the Faith, and is worſe than an Infidel: i. e.* Acts contrary to the Obligations both of *Nature* and Religion. But *he* will ſoon *ruin*, inſtead of *ſupporting* his Family, who ſuffers ill Men, without Interruption, to make what Havock they pleaſe of his *Perſon*, *Reputation* or *Eſtate*.

But now as for *smaller* Injuries in any of these Respects, such as make no *great* Alteration in our Circumstances, and may be born without any *great* Inconvenience; these are to be pass'd by, and the Injury forgiven according to the Measures before described: And 'tis observable that the Instances our Saviour makes use of in this Matter, are of the lesser Sort of Injuries, such as a Blow on the Cheek, the taking away of a Garment, and the like; and 'twas for being rigorous about a few *Pence*, that the King in the Parable was so wroth with his Servant: And rather than a Christian should embroil himself in Law-Suits, and run the Hazard of losing the Ornament of a meek and quiet Spirit for such small Matters, he should suffer a Repetition of *such* Injuries. And indeed, as Religion is in all Respects the greatest *Prudence*, so particularly in forbidding *litigious* Quarrels, unless a Man's *whole* Interest, or at least a *great* Part of it be at Stake; for *Law* is now become a *boundless Ocean*, and generally very rough and Stormy, and swells Men's Passions to an exorbitant Height, and shipwrecks their *Charity* as well as their *Estates*.

And as to those greater Injuries our Saviour mentions, *Mat.* 5. 44. of Men's being our *Enemies* profess'd, and *hating*, and curs-ing, and *despitefully* using, and *persecuting* us; Neither he nor his Apostles, there or any where else forbid Christians endeavouring in a legal Manner to secure and defend themselves,

ſelves, and recover their own; but only not to return Evil for Evil, and to be ſo far from Purpoſes of *Revenge* or *retaliating* ſuch Injuries, as rather to *love* and *bleſs* and *pray for*, and do *good to* upon Occaſion, thoſe that deal ſo maliciouſly by them; and to manage the Suit or Contention with them with *Charity*, having no *Rancour* or *Malice* in their Hearts againſt the *Perſon* of their Adverſary. That is, in ſhort, our holy Religion does oblige us in *leſſer* Injuries intirely, both to paſs by the Offence, and forgive the *Offender* according to the Meaſures before deſcribed; but in *greater* Injuries of any Sort, where Ruin or inſupportable Damage will follow, though it permits, nay, obliges to endeavour a legal Reparation, and ſo *not* to forgive the *Offence*, yet Chriſtians muſt as intirely, and according to the ſame Meaſures forgive the *Offender*, as in the ſmalleſt Inſtances of Wrong. And by this Means they will become the Children of their heavenly Father, who though in infinite Mercy he forgave the World of *Sinners*, and moreover beſtowed on them richly all things to enjoy; yet in the Perſon of his bleſſed Son their Repreſentative, he ſeverely expreſs'd his Diſpleaſure againſt their *Sins*, that they might be deter'd from perſiſting in them afreſh, to the *Ruin* of their immortal Souls.

Beſides thoſe Injuries that terminate upon a Man's *ſelf* and his own Concerns, there are others done to our *Neighbour* and the

Publick, which must not be pass'd by without animadverting upon them according to their Deserts. As for Instance, if a bloody Villain murders a Man's Friend or Neighbour or Relation, and he knows who is the Murderer, it may be he *only*; in this Case, whatever Inclination he may have to conceal it, whether out of natural Compassion, or Unwillingness to be the Occasion of the Man's Execution, since nothing can recall the murder'd Person to Life, and the Murderer may live to repent, or the like: Because he is a Member of Society, and obliged, as much as in him lies, to promote its Safety and Happiness, which by such Villains is much *disturb'd* and *lessen'd*, and would be *ruin'd* should such Men pass *unpunish'd*; 'tis his Duty to endeavour by all lawful Means to bring so heinous an Offender to condign Punishment, that so *corrupt* a Member being cut off from the Community, the Health of the whole may be better secur'd. And so in all Cases of the like Nature. Always remembring that if any thing of *private Revenge* be intermix'd, it pollutes the Action, and makes the Man doubly guilty of *Malice* and *Hypocrisy*.

What has been hitherto said concerning the *Limits* of *forgiving Injuries*, concerns Men only as *private* Persons: As for *Magistrates* and *Governours*, they being constituted by God to be *a Terror to evil doers*, to be *Revengers to execute Wrath upon them*, and to *praise* and *encourage* those only that do

Rom. 13. 3, 4.

well:

well; the Meaſure of their Forgiveneſs of publick Injuries, is the publick Good; ſo far as is conſiſtent with their Obligations as Magiſtrates, as is conducive to the common *Weal*, according to the Judgment of *Prudence* and *unprejudic'd Reaſon*, they *may*, and do *well* to incline to Lenity and Compaſſion; but a *fooliſh* and a *mercenary* Pity is a betraying their Truſt, a *bearing the Sword in vain*; and *ſuch* Magiſtrates, inſtead of being *Fathers* of their Country, are indeed the Perfidious *Deſtroyers* of it. And thus much for the Nature of chriſtian *Forgiveneſs of Injuries*, in Imitation of the divine Pattern God has ſet us, with its general Limits.

As for the great *Obligation* we have to *copy* after this admirable Pattern of our merciful heavenly Father; it is twofold, (1) With Reſpect to *God*, (2) to our *Selves*.

Firſt, With Reſpect to *God*, our Obligation to forgive *one another* as he has forgiven us is very great, becauſe 'tis what he has declared will be highly *pleaſing* to him, as a Reſemblance of that Perfection of his Nature which he ſeems moſt of all to take *Delight* in. For ſo, *Exod.* 33. 19. when *Moſes* deſired to ſee his *Glory*, he told him he would make all his *Goodneſs* paſs before him; and Chap. 34. 6. The Lord paſſed by before him and proclaimed, *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-ſuffering, abundant in Goodneſs and Truth, keeping Mercy for Thouſands, forgiving Iniquity, Tranſgreſſion and Sin.* And accordingly,

ingly, St. *John* gives the Definition of him, *God is Love.*

Now certainly, those that have receiv'd such infinite Favours from this good God, and have been forgiven so *vast* a Debt, as we sinners have; have the greatest Reason in the World to endeavour to the utmost of their Power, to please this their greatest Benefactor in every thing: And nothing being more pleasing to him than to see the Image and Reflection of his divine *Love* and *Philanthropy* upon the Souls of his Creatures, to see 'em love and compassionate one another according to his glorious Example; we are infinitely obliged to imitate his Pity and Forgiveness towards *us*, in passing by the Offences of our *Fellow-Servants.* Further, those to whom God has forgiven so vast a Debt as that which miserable Sinners ow'd to the divine Justice, are questionless bound, and that with the strictest Ties to love him infinitely again; but now St. *John* says plainly, that *he that loves God must love his Brother also, and if a Man say, I love God, and yet hateth his Brother, he is a Lyar, and the Truth is not in him*: For as he says, *Chap.* 3. 17. *He that shutteth up his Bowels of Compassion from his Brother, how dwelleth the Love of God in him?* And therefore, as much as we are bound to love our *good God*, who has forgiven us our *numberless Iniquities*, so much are we bound to *manifest* that our Love to him, by being pitiful and gentle to

1 Joh. 4. 20, 21.

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our *brethren* that have injur'd *us*, and ready to *forgive* them: For *ſo* ſays our Lord, ſhall ye be my *Diſciples*, and *ſo* ſhall ye be the *Children* of your *Father which is in Heaven.* And doubtleſs that wicked Servant in the Parable, had not ſo due an Apprehenſion of his Lord's great Compaſſion to *him*, nor ſo *grateful* a Senſe of it as he ought to have had, who could immediately forget the miſerable Condition he was ſo lately in *himſelf*, and how much he dreaded leſt his Lord ſhould rigidly exact his great Debt of him, and how importunately he begg'd that he would have Patience with him: ; and yet uſe ſo much Cruelty to his Fellow-Servant for a Debt very inconſiderable. He could not but know that ſuch *Barbarity* would be very contrary to the compaſſionate Temper of his Lord; and therefore was bound in *Gratitude*, if upon no other Account, to imitate his Lord's Example, and not immediately act what would be ſo diſpleaſing to him. And ſo it is in our Caſe; God is *Love*, and has wondrouſly *manifeſted* his Love in forgiving us miſerable Sinners; and therefore we are bound, in *Gratitude*, and becauſe 'twill be *pleaſing* to him, were that all, to imitate that his Charity, and mutually to love and forgive one another. But when beſides, we have our Saviour's expreſs *Command* for it, *Mat.* 5. 44. and *Luk.* 6. 37. and that, *not until ſeven times only, but until ſeventy times ſeven*, as in the Verſe before this Parable: As much as Men are ob-

obliged to obey the Commands of God their Saviour, ſo ſtrong is their Obligation to forgive Injuries with Reſpect to *God*.

Secondly, Our Obligation is very great to imitate God's compaſſionate Example, with reſpect to our *ſelves*. For 'tis the beſt Way to *ſecure Quiet*, and *Peace* and *Happineſs*; and as much as every Man is bound to provide for his own Quiet, and the *Peace* and *Happineſs* of *Society*, and of his own Soul too in the other World; ſo much is every Man bound not to be malicious and revengeful, but of a Temper ready to *forgive*.

For however *ſweet* Revenge may ſeem to be to malicious Spirits in the *Execution*, it muſt needs make the Mind very *uneaſie before* 'tis executed, and bring great Calamities along with it *afterward*, and is the moſt baſe *deviliſh* Temper in the World, and makes a Man a *Fiend incarnate*. Whereas an Aptneſs to *forgive*, is a *Godlike* Diſpoſition, for God is *Love*, the *Spring* of Kindneſs and Compaſſion, of Mercy and Forgiveneſs; and as *his* Happineſs is the Reſult of the Excellencies and Perfections of his *Nature*; ſo thoſe who reſemble him in the moſt *glorious* of thoſe Perfections, muſt needs likewiſe enjoy a great Share of Tranquillity and inward Bliſs. But if *God* be the great Exemplar of *Forgiveneſs*, how groundleſs is the uſual Objection againſt this excellent Vertue of Chriſtianity, that it betrays a

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mean ſervile Spirit, and is a thing much *below* a *Gentleman*! Can any Man of common Senſe think it a Diſgrace to be like *God*, and that in his moſt *glorious* Perfection too? If God be the Fountain of Honour, we muſt allow it to be rather, the moſt *noble generous* Action in the World.

It is the beſt Way likewiſe of *ending* Striſes, and *overcoming* our Adverſaries by rendring *Good* for *Evil*. It eaſes the Mind of thoſe great *Diſquietudes* that conſtantly attend Deſires of Revenge; it prevents all the Miſchiefs that *follow* it, ſuch as *freſh* Injuries from the Party we revenge our ſelves upon, if we leave him his Life, and the Stroke of Juſtice if we perſue him to the Death. But beſides theſe evil Conſequences of Revenge, and many others which *Forgiveneſs prevents*, there is more true *Pleaſure* and *Sweetneſs* in the *Act* of Forgiveneſs and *Reconciliation*, as was hinted above, than in that of *Revenge*.

For however the Devil may hurry Men on in an eager Perſuit of Revenge, and flatter 'em with the Hopes of great *Satisfaction* when 'tis *perfected*; yet there is a ſecret *Horrour* and *Averſion* to it from *within*, which, as 'twere pulls *back* the Hand when going to ſtrike; or what other way ſoever it be expreſſed, endeavours to *hinder* it, and makes the Heart recoil and repent of the Undertaking, and *execute* it with *trembling* and miſgivings of Soul; and immediately *after*, come dire Forebodings of the Venge

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ance of him to whom Vengeance belongeth, and a Kind of Hell upon Earth. But *Forgiveneſs* is attended with *Applauſes* of Conſcience, and the *Approbation* of *Reaſon*, and *Chearfulneſs* of Spirit: There is an inward Pleaſure and *Satisfaction* of Mind quite throughout the Action, and when 'tis *compleated*, no Man can expreſs the ſilent *Joy* that runs through the whole Soul, and it ſeems a Foretaſte of the Joys of the Bleſſed in *Heaven*.

Even that Part of Forgiveneſs which ſeems moſt of all impracticable, and contrary to Fleſh and Blood, that of *ſuing* to a Man to be reconciled that has *done* the Injury, and ſtill *continues* to be one's Enemy; *this* does of all yeild the *greateſt* Pleaſure to the Soul: And that, not only becauſe 'tis the *neareſt* Reſemblance to the Mercy of *God*, who ſent his Son to mediate between him and us, and by his Death to reconcile us to himſelf, when 'twas *we* miſerable Wretches that had *offended*, and were then in *actual* Rebellion againſt him; but from the Nature of the thing *it ſelf*. For 'tis a kind of *ſurprizing* a Man into Charity before he is *aware*. When Men *do* Injuries, they generally ſtand upon their *Defence* and expect to *receive* Injuries again; but when a Man finds, inſtead of this, Acts of Friendſhip and Goodwill, and Readineſs to forgive, and Peace and Quietneſs *offer'd* ſo *freely*, and upon ſuch eaſie Terms, without the *Shame* and natural Regret in *ſeeking* it, and *asking* Pardon,

Pardon, and making *Satisfaction*, and the like: How pleas'd muſt the Man needs be, to find a *Friend*, when he fear'd and expected an Enemy? Few Men love Strife for *Strife's Sake*, and many a Man injures another in ſuddain *Heat* and Paſſion, and in cooler Blood *repents* of it, though he can't prevail with himſelf to *ask Forgiveneſs*: And ſometimes a Man injures another in retaliating ſomething that he took amiſs from *him*, though perhaps far otherwiſe *intended*; and it may be *falſe Reports* may have made the Difference. But now, *this* Way of Reconciliation preſently ſets all right again; it creates a right Underſtanding between Party and Party, it nips Quarrels in the very *Bud*, and leaves no Room for further Malice and Ill Will. And what a holy *Triumph* will there then be in the forgiving Soul, thus to have ſoftned his Enemy, and overcome *Evil* with Good!

And ſuch *happy Effects* of Forgiveneſs of Injuries as theſe, methinks ſhould engage every conſidering Man to put it in *Practice*, were this *all*; but when beſides all this ſo great a Mercy as the perfect Recovery of the Favour of *God*, the Forgiveneſs of our *own vaſt* Debt, and the Enjoyment of the Glories and Felicities of *Heaven* ſhall be the *Reward* of it; Surely no Man in his Wits, but muſt think himſelf as much obliged to *forgive Injuries*, as to make himſelf eternally happy if he can. And that this exceeding great *Reward* ſhall attend the hearty Practice

ctice of this *Vertue*, is plain from our Lord's own Words, *Luke* 6. 37. *Forgive, and ye ſhall be forgiven.*

And, as it appears from what has been ſaid, that we have upon all Accounts great *Obligation* to imitate the compaſſionate Example of our merciful God; ſo in the

Second Place, Our *Baſeneſs* will be very great if we do *not*: And that both with Reſpect to God and Man. With Reſpect to *God*, not to forgive a *petty* Injury from our Brother, when God has forgiven ſuch *infinite* Provocations as ours againſt *himſelf*, is the vileſt *Baſeneſs*, becauſe, as was ſaid before, 'tis the vileſt *Ingratitude*, and *Forgetfulneſs* of his great Mercy to us. I ſay a *petty* Injury from our Brother; for *every* Injury, how great ſoever, that one Mortal can do to another, is indeed, but of *no regard*, in compare with thoſe mountainous Heaps of Wickedneſſes which we have been guilty of againſt God; and bear not ſo great Proportion to them, as an *Hundred Pence* does to *Ten Thouſand Talents*; as the Parable expreſſes both Debts, that which the compaſſionate *King* forgave his *Servant*, and that which that *wicked Man* would not forgive his *Fellow-Servant*. The infinite Goodneſs of God to *us*, if it has made its due Impreſſion upon our Spirits, will leave ſo charming an Idea of Forgiveneſs upon our Souls, as will incline us to a ſuitable Practice upon all Occaſions, eſpecially ſince we know from God's great Compaſſion

paſſion towards us, how *pleaſing* to him Compaſſion is in others. But, notwithſtanding God's unſpeakable Kindneſs to *us*, to cheriſh a Temper of Mind which we can't but be ſenſible he *infinitely Hates*, and endeavour to make thoſe miſerable as far as our Malice will reach, to whom *God* has forgiven as much as he forgave *us*, and for whoſe Redemption Chriſt dyed, and for whom are reſerv'd Crowns of Glory in Heaven, through the wondrous Mercy of God; and all this unmerciſulneſs for a *ſmall* Matter, for the Debt of a few *Pence*: This ſhews the baſeſt of *Ingratitude*, and *weak* Senſe of God's Compaſſion ſhewn to us, that is poſſible. Well may our Lord ſay to ſuch Men, with a little Variation, as the King in the Parable ſaid to that cruel Servant of his; *O thou wicked Servant, I forgave thee all that Debt, and that though thou didſt not deſire it of me; ſhouldſt not thou alſo have had Compaſſion on thy Fellow-Servant, even as I had Pity on thee?* *Obligation* ſufficient there was no Doubt; and that his Ingratitude, and Forgetfulneſs of God's Favour, and his cruel hardned Temper was very provoking will appear in the Sequel. But,

Secondly, To be revengeful and implacable after ſuch Mercy receiv'd our *ſelves*, is the greateſt Baſeneſs with Reſpect to *Men*. For we are all *Fellow-Servants* of the *ſame* great *Lord*; and his *Mercy* has been the *ſame* to all of us; we are all of us through Chriſt, under the ſame Covenant of Grace and *Reconciliation*:

conciliation: Now *this* methinks should *endear* us to one another, and our mutual Joy for each others Happiness, should put an End to all other *petty* Quarrels and *Animosities* between us. But instead of this, to hate and mischief one another, to endeavour by all means to make one another as *unhappy* as we can here below, and with him in the Parable, pluck out Throats for *Trifles*, and become *inexorable* to any that have injur'd us; this is such an *unnatural* Piece of *Barbarity*, and betrays so much *devillish* Baseness of Spirit, as that every sensible Man, when he considers it will *abominate*. 'Tis as if a Man should escape to Shoar from a Wreck at Sea, and there meet one whom Providence had bless'd with the same Deliverance; and instead of *congratulating* his *Safety*, and joyning with him in praising and blessing the Mercy of their great Deliverer, endeavour to knock out his Brains in Persuance of some *old Grudge*. Nothing can be more *base* than this, nor more justly *provoking* to the God of *Mercy* and *Compassion*. Which leads me in the

Last Place to consider the miserable *Consequence* of this Baseness, *viz.* We shall thereby provoke God to *recall* his Pardon to *us*, and deal with us as the King in the Parable did with his wicked ungrateful and cruel Servant, *and deliver us over to the Tormentors, till we shall have paid all that is due unto him. For so likewise*, says our Lord, *shall my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye from*

from your Hearts forgive not every one his Brother their Treſpaſſes.

God's Pardon to Sinners, though it be very *full* and *free*, and given in infinite *Mercy*; yet is not paſs'd in ſuch a Manner as that it can never be *revok'd*; 'twas given at *firſt* upon *Conditions*, and may be again *forfeited* if we fail of performing what God *requires*, in order to his final *ratifying* it.

Now *Forgiveneſs of Injuries* is expreſly mention'd by our Saviour, as Part of what God expects from us in order to his *confirming* his Pardon to us; for thus, *Mat.* 6.14,15. *If ye forgive Men their Treſpaſſes, your heavenly Father will alſo forgive you; but if ye forgive not Men their Treſpaſſes, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your Treſpaſſes*; but, as 'tis in the Parable, his Wrath will again wax hot againſt you, and he will make void his former Pardon, and *deliver you over to the Tormentors till you ſhall pay all that is due unto him.* That is, will conſign you to the Portion of the Devil and his Angels, Spirits of like malicious and revengeful Tempers, who, as the *mercileſs* Executioners of God's Vengeance, will not for ever ſpare to torment and cruciate thoſe wretched Souls, who might have eſcap'd thoſe Miſeries, and had their Pardon *ſeal'd* with the Blood of their Redeemer, but *forfeited* it again by indulging to that deviliſh Temper of *Malice* and *Revenge*.

Wherefore, to conclude this Parable. If we are touch'd with a due Senſe of the wondrous

wondrous Compassion of God to us miserable Sinners in forgiving us the vast Debt we had contracted to the divine Justice by Reason of our Sins, and which 'twas impossible for us ever to have discharg'd our selves; whereby we are deliver'd from the intolerable and endless *Punishment* of them; and moreover made *Sons of God*, and Heirs of celestial Glory: If we are duly touch'd with a Sense of this infinite Goodness of God to *us* (which to effect was the Endeavour of the *first* Part of this Discourse) let us express our deep Resentment of his gracious Forgiveness of *us*, by imitating so excellent an Example, and *forgiving one another*. Let us consider the great *Happiness*, that both here and hereafter will attend the Performance of this Duty; and reflect upon the endless Misery that will closely follow the contrary. We must *forgive*, if we would be *forgiven*; we must shew Mercy and Compassion to our Brethren that offend *us*, if we hope to find any at the Hands of God. And let us remember, that, how *sweet* soever we may fancy *Revenge* to be *now*, we shall find the Consequence of it, if not speedily repented of, to be *eternal Damnation*.

From which sad Condition, and that hellish Temper that will bring us to it, let us pray earnestly that the good Lord would deliver us, through Jesus Christ our merciful Saviour.

The

The PRAYER.

I.

O Holy and moſt merciful King of Heaven, who haſt forgiven a World of miſerable Wretches an infinite Debt, and deliver'd thoſe who had nothing to pay from the extremeſt and eternal Miſery, and haſt commanded that in Return we do to others as thou haſt done to us; I who am a happy Sharer in thy wondrous Compaſſion, do praiſe thee from the Bottom of my Soul, and earneſtly entreat the Aſſiſtance of thy Grace, that I may never be wanting in a ſincere and chearful Imitation of thy bleſſed Example, but delight to copy after ſo lovely an Original, and freely and intirely forgive, nay love and do good to my moſt inveterate Enemies. And ſince thou lov'dſt us firſt, and didſt prevent us with the Riches of thy Goodneſs, O that I could in this reſemble thee too, and even court my Injurers to Peace and Reconciliation, and with a Chriſtian Bravery of Spirit, *offer them that forgiveneſs which* they will not ask! This is indeed a hard Saying to my deprav'd Nature, and Revenge ſeems ſweeter far to Fleſh and Blood; and though my Reaſon, I confeſs, is ſatisfyed of the great Excellency of the Performance, yet my Paſſions, I muſt with Shame own likewiſe, run violently

the contrary Way, and bear me down with their rapid Courſe. Thy Aid I therefore beg, Almighty God, and that thy Spirit may enable me to ſtem this dangerous Current, and ſtrenuouſly to reſiſt and maſter all Motions to revenge, remembring that this is the Condition of my open Forgiveneſs at thy Hands, and that Judgment without Mercy ſhall be my Portion if I ſhew no Mercy.

II.

Convince me daily more and more of my baſe Ingratitude to thee, and inhumane Barbarity to my Brethren, in bearing Malice and Rancour for trifling Injuries (ſuch as are the greateſt we can offer to each other, in Compare with what thy Mercy hath forgiven us:) And do thou, O meekeſt Jeſus, ſweeten our Tempers, and turn all Bitterneſs of Spirit into Love and mutual Endeavours to promote each others Happineſs; and may we all conſpire in offering up our joint Praiſes to our merciful God, who has remitted to every one of us infinitely more than Ten Thouſand Talents. O that this thy Mercy may be imprinted in lively and everlaſting Characters upon my Soul, ſo as powerfully to incline me to tranſcribe it in my Intercourſe with Men! Then ſhall I experience the bleſſed Influence this *thy* Commandment will have upon my Happineſs even here, and in the moſt acceptable Manner expreſs my Thankfulneſs for thy Pity ſhew'd to me; and at laſt by bearing this

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thy Badge upon my Soul, be own'd by thee as thy true Disciple, and receiv'd into the Joy of thee our deareſt Lord. Which grant O moſt compaſſionate Jeſus for thine own Mercies Sake. *Amen, Amen.*

PARABLE V.

Of a King that made a Marriage for his Son.

Matth. xxii. 2, 3. Luk. xiv. 18, 19, 20. Matth. xxii. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.

Mat. 22.2. *The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a certain King, that made a Marriage for his Son,*

And ſent forth his Servants to call them that were bidden to the Wedding: And they would not come.

And they all with one conſent began to make Excuſe: The firſt ſaid unto him, I have bought a Piece of Ground, and I muſt needs go and ſee it; I pray thee have me excuſed.

Luk. 14. 18.

And another ſaid, I have bought five Yoke of Oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excuſed.

And another ſaid, I have married a Wife, and therefore I cannot come.

Mat. 22.4. *Again he ſent forth other Servants, ſaying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold I have prepared my Dinner: my Oxen and my Fatlings*

lings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the Marriage.

But they made light of it, and went their Ways, one to his Farm, another to his Merchandiſe:

And the Remnant took his Servants, and entreated them ſpitefully, and ſlew them.

But when the King heard thereof, he was wroth: And he ſent forth his Armies, and deſtroyed thoſe Murderers, and burnt up their City.

Then ſaith he to his Servants, the Wedding is ready, but thoſe that were bidden were not worthy.

Go ye therefore into the High-ways, and as many as ye ſhall find, bid to the Marriage.

So thoſe Servants went out into the High-ways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good: and the Wedding was furniſh'd with Gueſts.

And when the King came in to ſee the Gueſts, he ſaw there a Man that had not on a wedding Garment:

And he ſaith unto him, Friend, how cameſt thou in hither, not having a wedding Garment? And he was ſpeechleſs.

Then ſaid the King to the Servants, Bind him Hand and Foot, and take him away and caſt him into outer Darkneſs: There ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of Teeth.

For many are called, but few are choſen.

THIS Parable, I ſuppoſe, was in its *firſt* Intention, deſign'd to reprove the hardned *Infidelity* of the *Jews*, their obſtinately *rejecting* the Mercy of God to them in *Chriſt Jeſus*, and their

vile *Ingratitude* to him for his *peculiar* Care of them, in ſo ordering it, that the Goſpel ſhould be *firſt* preach'd to *them* (to which Purpoſe alſo was ſpoken the Parable of the wicked Husbandmen in *Mat.* 21. 33. which, for its great Affinity to the firſt Part of this Parable, and intire Relation to the Jews, I thought fit to paſs by) and it was likewiſe intended to ſhew God's great *Anger* againſt them for that their *Stubbornneſs* and malicious Treatment of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, and how ſad the Conſequence of it would be, both in this World and the next: And withall, to declare God's Purpoſe of receiving the *Gentiles* into the Fold of Chriſt, upon *their* deſpiſing and rejecting that ineſtimable Favour, and moreover, that *whoever* makes Profeſſion of *Chriſtianity*, muſt *live* agreeably, and be conformable to all its holy Laws, or elſe their Condition will be more deplorable than ever. This, I think was the *firſt* Intention of this Parable.

But beſides this, it has another Aſpect which is intirely *Chriſtian*, and is full of Reproof and Inſtruction to us that have *already* embrac'd the Diſcipline of Chriſt, and is very aptly expreſſive of theſe Four things, which I ſhall make the Subject of the following Diſcourſe.

Firſt, It is lively expreſſive of the *Nature* of the *Goſpel* or Chriſtian Religion, as repreſenting it by the *Marriage of a King's Son*, and the *poor* and the *maim'd*, the *halt* and the *blind* being call'd in to partake of the *Wedding Supper*. *Secondly*,

Secondly, Of God's great Care in having this Religion *publiſh'd* and made known to *all Men*, and his repeated *Invitations* to all Men to *embrace* it; repreſented by that King's *ſending forth his Servants to call them that were bidden to the Wedding, and again ſending forth other Servants, and commanding them to tell thoſe that were bidden that he had prepar'd and made all things ready, and therefore to urge them to come unto the Marriage.*

Thirdly, It very aptly expreſſes, what kind of *Reception*, this *holy Religion*, and the Teachers of it are like to meet with in the World; repreſented here by Men's making *light* of the Invitation to the Marriage of the King's Son, and offering *Excuſes*, ſuch as, of having *bought a Piece of Ground*, and a *Yoke of Oxen*, and of having *married a Wife*, and that theſe things would engage their Time, and therefore they could not come: And accordingly, going their own Way, *one to his Farm*, and *another* to his *Merchandiſe*, and the reſt taking thoſe Servants that came to invite them, and *intreating them ſpitefully, and ſlaying them.*

Fourthly, It expreſſes how ſad their Condition will be, that either when they are invited to, yet *reject* this holy Religion, and abuſe the Preachers of it; or elſe, though they do *profeſs* it, yet *live* not *agreeably* to it. The *latter* of which is repreſented by the King's finding a Man at the Marriage Supper that had not on a *Wedding Gar-*

ment, and ſaying unto him, *Friend, how cameſt thou in hither not having on a Wedding Garment?* And the Man's being *ſpeechleſs* upon it, and the King's commanding his Servants *to bind him Hand and Foot and take him away, and caſt him into outer Darkneſs, where ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of Teeth:* And the *former* is expreſs'd by the King's being wroth with thoſe that *ſlighted* his Invitation, and pronouncing them *not worthy* of it, and reſolving that they ſhould not *taſte of his Supper*, and ſending his Servants to invite *others* to the Wedding, and commanding his Armies to go forth and *deſtroy thoſe Murderers*, that had ſpitefully entreated and ſlain his Servants, and to *burn up their City.*

And then after all, there is a general Obſervation drawn from hence, namely, *That many are called, but few are choſen.* Of each of theſe I ſhall diſcourſe in their Order.

Firſt, this Parable does very *lively* expreſs the *Nature* of the *Goſpel* or Chriſtian Religion; repreſented here by *the Marriage of a King's Son*, and the *poor* and the *maim'd*, the *halt* and the *blind* being call'd in as Gueſts to partake of the *Wedding Supper.*

St. *Paul*, in his Epiſtle to *Titus*, *Chap.* 2. *Verſ.* 14, ſays, that *Chriſt gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity, and* purifie *to himſelf a peculiar or* purchas'd *People* (as 'tis in the Original) *zealous of good Works*; and *Epheſ.* 1. 14. Chriſtians are called the *purchas'd* Poſſeſſion: In Alluſion,

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I ſuppoſe, both to the *Jewiſh* Cuſtom of the Man giving a *Dowry* to her whom he made his *Wife*, thereby *purchaſing* her to himſelf as his own Peculiar; and likewiſe to a Cuſtom of the *Græcians*, who had an Officer on purpoſe to *educate*, and *form*, and *refine* Women deſign'd for Marriage, and then to preſent them to thoſe that were to be their Husbands: Agreeable to which is that of St. *Paul*, 2 *Cor.* 11.2. *I have eſpous'd you to one Husband, that I may preſent you as a pure and chaſt Virgin unto Chriſt.* And accordingly, our Lord often compares *himſelf* to a *Bridegroom*, and his *Church* to the *Bride*, and his *Diſciples* to the *Children of the Bride-Chamber*, or the Friends and ſpecial Attendants of the Bride and Bridegroom. And *Epheſ.* 5. 35. *Chriſt lov'd the Church, and gave himſelf for it, that he might ſanctifie and cleanſe it by the waſhing of Water by the Word, that he might preſent it to himſelf, a glorious Church, not having Spot or Wrinkle, or any ſuch thing; but that it ſhould be holy and without Blemiſh:* And then, *Verſ.* 30. *we are Members of his Body, of his Fleſh, and of his Bones* (according to what is ſaid of Man and Wife, *Gen.* 2. 24. *They two ſhall be one Fleſh*) and *Verſ.* 32. *This is a great Myſtery; but I ſpeak concerning Chriſt and the Church.*

The Goſpel then, or Chriſtian Religion, being likened to a *Marriage* made by *God*, the glorious King of Heaven, for his *eternal Son*; and *Chriſt* the Promulger of this Goſpel,

ſpel, the firſt Teacher of this Religion, being *that Son of God*, and that divine *Bridegroom*, and the *Church*, or thoſe that believe this Goſpel, and embrace this Religion, being the *Bride*; it informs us in *general*, that the *Nature* of the *Goſpel*, or Chriſtian Religion, is like that of *Marriage*, and makes the *ſame Relation* between *Chriſt* and *Believers*, as *Marriage* does between a *Man* and his *Wife*; and intitles to like *Privileges*, and obliges to like *Duties*, and is productive of like *Effects*.

Firſt, the Goſpel or Chriſtian Religion makes the ſame *Relation* between *Chriſt* and *Believers*, as *Marriage* does between *Man* and *Wife*, *i. e.* the *neareſt*, the *deareſt*, and likewiſe an *inſeparable Relation*: For, that Marriage is the *neareſt* Relation, is evident from what is ſaid *Gen.* 2. 24, that a Man ſhall *leave Father and Mother, and cleave to his Wife*; 'tis the *deareſt* Relation, becauſe a Man's Wife is as *himſelf*, *Bone of his Bone, and Fleſh of his Fleſh*, as *Eve* was of *Adam*, and *no Man* ever yet *hated* his *own Fleſh* (as St. *Paul has it*) but *nouriſheth and cheriſheth it*; *and Men ought to love their Wives as their own Bodies*; and he that *loveth his Wife ſtill loveth himſelf*: And 'tis an *inſeparable* Relation likewiſe; for though *God* permitted *Divorce* to the *Jews* for the Hardneſs of their Hearts, and *Chriſt*, in ſome Caſes, and for the ſame Reaſon permits it to us *Chriſtians*, yet from the *Beginning* it was not ſo; and thoſe whom God

God had ſo *nearly* joyn'd together, were not at *firſt* intended ever to be *put a-ſunder* but by Death.

In like manner, the Goſpel or Chriſtian Religion does (1.) create the *neareſt* Relation between Chriſt and Believers; it makes us *Members of his Body, of his Fleſh, and of his Bones*; and as was before quoted from St. *Paul*, *Epheſ.* 5. 30. *i. e.* it makes us as *near* to him as the *Members* are to the *Head*, the *Fleſh* and *Bones* to the *Body*; or as our Church expreſſes it, it makes us *one with Chriſt and Chriſt with us*; 'tis ſo near a Relation that nothing can ſufficiently expreſs it but what expreſſes an *Union*. It creates likewiſe (2.) the *deareſt* Relation, for thus our Lord, *John* 14. 21. *He that hath my Commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me ſhall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifeſt my ſelf unto him*; and Verſ. 23. *We will come unto him and make our Abode with him*; and Chap. 15. 14. *Ye are my Friends if ye do whatſoever I command you.* And *Rev.* 3. 20. *Behold*, ſays our Lord, *I ſtand at the Door and knock; if any Man hear my Voice and open the Door, i. e.* by Faith and Obedience, *I will come in unto him, and ſup with him and he with me*; he will ſhew the greateſt Expreſſions of Dearneſs and Affection to him. And as the Goſpel makes the *neareſt* and *deareſt* Relation between Chriſt and Believers, ſo that Relation is (3.) *inſeparable*; *i. e.* unleſs we willfully *divorce*

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our ſelves from him by *Apoſtacy* or *Diſobedience*. Thus a little before his Aſcenſion he tells his Apoſtles, and in them all faithful Believers that obſerve whatſoever he hath commanded, that he will be *with them always, even to the End of the World*: And becauſe he was to aſcend to *his* Father and *their* Father, to *his* God and *their* God, therefore ſays he, *I will not leave you comfortleſs, but will pray to the Father, and he ſhall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever*, *John* 14. 16. and in the 2. and 3. Verſes of that Chapter, *I go to prepare a Place for you, and if I go and prepare a Place for you, I will come again and receive you to my ſelf, that where I am, there ye may be alſo.* And *John* 10. 27, 28. *My Sheep hear my Voice and I know them and they follow me; and I give unto them Eternal Life, and they ſhall never periſh, neither ſhall any pluck them out of my Hand.* And St. *Paul* with great Aſſurance asks this Queſtion, *Rom.* 8. 35. *Who ſhall ſeparate us from the Love of Chriſt?* and after enumerating what in the Eſteem of the World was moſt likely to do it, he concludes, Verſ. the laſt, that *nothing ſhall be able to ſeparate us from the Love of God which is in Chriſt Jeſus our Lord.* And he is likewiſe in a *ſpiritual* Manner always with us in the Reception of thoſe Myſteries which he inſtituted in *Remembrance* of him.

The Goſpel then, effecting ſo *near*, ſo *dear*, and ſo *inſeparable* a Relation between Chriſt

Chriſt and Believers, that nothing can ſo fitly reſemble it as the State of *Marriage*; we may from hence collect in the next place, what *Privileges* the Goſpel intitles Believers to, by reaſon of this their ſo *intimate* Relation to *Chriſt*.

As *firſt*, it intitles to the peculiar *Love* and *Tenderneſs* of Chriſt, ſuch a Love as will incline him to promote the *Happineſs* of Believers, and to *pity* and compaſſionate their *Infirmities*, Failures and Imperfections; for Love covereth a Multitude of Faults Thus the Apoſtle, *Col.* 3. 19. *Husbands love your Wives, and be not bitter againſt them*; be not extreme to obſerve every little Defect and Failing in them, but conſider 'em as the weaker Veſſel, and bear with their Infirmities. And accordingly the Author to the *Hebrews* ſays of our Lord, he is not one that cannot be touch'd with a Senſe of our Infirmities, but knows and pities them, having been in all Points tempted as we are, though without Sin, *Heb.* 4. 15. And as for his *Tenderneſs* and Care of our *Happineſs*, 'tis miraculouſly evident in that *he gave himſelf for us*, ſacrific'd his very *Life* for our reconciliation to his offended Father, *that he might ſanctifie and cleanſe us, and preſent us to himſelf a glorious Church, not having Spot or Wrinkle or any ſuch thing, but that we ſhould be holy and without Blemiſh*; as the Apoſtle expreſſes it in the before cited *Eph.* 5, 26. *&c.* And he does continually *nouriſh* and *cheriſh* us by the Communications of his Grace

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in the blessed Sacrament (that spiritual Body of his, *which whoso eateth of shall live for ever*) and by the Comforts and Assistances of his holy Spirit. And to lye thus in the Bosome of the *Son of God*, to have such great Degrees of his Love and Tenderness to us express'd in such *amazing* Instances; to be thus *pitied* and commiserated, and our Failures excus'd and *past by*, by him that is to be our *Judge*; and our *Happiness* in all Respects so carefully endeavoured by *him* who is the *Fountain* of it: This is such a Privilege as can never be enough valu'd, and is infinitely above the Reach of any Comparison.

Another Privilege the Gospel intitles Believers to upon their so near Relation to Christ, is Christ's *Protection* of them from *Dangers*, and *Defence* against *Assaults of Enemies*. For, as in Marriage, the Husband is the Shield and *Guardian* of his Wife, so Christ is the *Protector* and Defender of the faithful; he covers them from the Rage and Malice of unreasonable *Men*, and arms them against the Attacks of the Spirits of Darkness, by the Supplies and Aids of his blessed Spirit; *who helps our Infirmities, and strengthens us mightily in the inner Man*, so that the Gates of Hell, all the infernal Powers shall not be able to prevail against us. And accordingly, says St. *Paul*, *I can do all things through Christ that strengthneth me*, *Phil.* 4. 13. *Rom.* 8. 37. *In all these things, Tribulation, Distress, Persecution, Famine, Naked-*

Nakedneſs, Peril or Sword, in all theſe things we are more than Conquerers. By what means? Why, *through Chriſt that loveth us.* And our Lord ſays expreſly in the forecited *John* 10. 27. *my Sheep that hear my Voice ſhall never periſh, neither ſhall any pluck them out of my Hand.* And if the Almighty Son of God be for us, and takes us into his own Protection, and ſhields and guards us as a Husband does the Wife of his Boſome; who then can be againſt us? *We ſhall be hid under his Wings, and ſafe under his Feathers, his Faithfulneſs and Truth ſhall be our Shield and Buckler.* And, *to dwell thus under the Defence of the moſt High, and abide under the Shadow of the Allmighty*, is, no doubt, an ineſtimable Privilege.

Again, as the Husband confers *Honour* upon his Wife, intitles *her* to have a Share in that Honour that is due to *him*; ſo Believers, by their intimate Union with Chriſt, are advanc'd to the *higheſt* Step of Honour that *Mortals* can arrive at: For, what more honourable than to be in ſo near a Relation to the moſt glorious Son of God! Accordingly the Scripture exhorts us to walk *worthy* of our holy Profeſſion, *Epheſ.* 4. 1. and to have our Converſation as *becomes* the Goſpel of Chriſt. And agreeably ſaid our Lord to the Seventy Diſciples, whom he ſent as Harbingers to the Places whither he himſelf intended to come, *he that deſpiſeth you deſpiſeth me*; and 'tis in ſome Proportion true of all other ſincere Be- Phil. 1. 27.

lievers.

lievers. *Christianity* is a most *honourable* Profession, and what *David* said to *Saul*, when he offered him his eldest Daughter to Wife for his great Services; *who am I, and what is my Life or my Fathers Family in* Israel, *that I should be Son in-law to a King?* may with infinitely greater Reason be said by every true Christian, *who am I, and what is my Life, that I should be taken into the nearest Relation to the eternal Son of the Majesty of Heaven and Earth!* No Title comparable to this, no Relation so much to be glori'd in, nor any Care too great to *live up to* so august a Character. But,

1 Sam. 18. 18.

In the last place, the Gospel intitles Believers, as to a Participation in some Degree of the *Honour* of Christ, so likewise of his *Glory* and *Happiness*. And, as a Husband is to provide for his *Wife* suitable to his *own Quality*, and make her a Sharer in his Happiness and *Prosperity*; so will Christ confer upon sincere Believers a *plentiful Share* of his *Glories* and *Felicities* in *Heaven*.

Thus, a little before his Passion, *in my Father's House*, says he, *are many Mansions, and I go to prepare a Place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to my self, that where I am there ye may be also.* And in that solemn Prayer to his heavenly Father, *John* 17. 22. *The Glory*, says he, *which thou gavest me I have given them*; and Vers. 24. *Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold thy Glory which*

John 14. 2, 3.

which thou haſt given me, i. e. may ſhare in the Beatifick Viſion, which is the *Summit* of all Happineſs. And *Rom.* 8.17. St. *Paul* ſays *we are joint Heirs with Chriſt, and if we ſuffer with him, i e.* ſtill continue faithful Believers notwithſtanding the Diſcouragements and Temptations of the World, *we ſhall be glorified together.* And 1 *Cor.* 14.23. Chriſt is call'd the *firſt Fruits* of a glorious Reſurrection to immortal Bliſs, which ſuppoſes a general Harveſt to follow *Chriſt the firſt Fruits, afterwards thoſe that are Chriſt's at his coming. For the Lord himſelf ſhall deſcend from Heaven with a Shout, with the Voice of the Arch-Angel, and with the Trump of God, and the Dead in Chriſt ſhall be raiſed firſt; then we which are alive and remain ſhall be caught up together with them in the Clouds, and ſo ſhall we ever be with the Lord,* 1 *Theſ.* 4.16.17. And if to all this we add, that this intimate Union of Believers with Chriſt, as of a Wife with her Husband, and theſe immenſe Privileges that are conſequent upon it, will be *everlaſting*; that *nothing* can put *aſunder* whom God has in infinite Mercy joyn'd thus *cloſe together*, but our wilful Unfaithfulneſs to this our divine Husband: As it will make up the Account of the Wonders of God's Love to the Children of Men, and ſhould in Return, make *us* all over Love and Gratitude to that good God who hath done ſuch great things for us; ſo it ſhould make us exceeding careful upon no Conſiderations whatever to divorce our ſelves from

this our glorious Husband, but for ever pay all poſſible Love and dutiful Obedience to him. Which brings me in the next Place to ſhew, that as the Goſpel effects the ſame *Relation* between Chriſt and Believers as Marriage does between a Man and his Wife, and intitles to the like *Privileges*; ſo it obliges likewiſe to the like *Duties*.

And *firſt*, As a *Wife* is bound to bear *unſpotted Love* and *Fidelity* to her *Husband*, ſo is every *Believer* bound to demean himſelf towards *Chriſt*. That is, to love him above all things, and to be *intirely his*; not to ſuffer his Affections to wander after *ſtrange* Loves, ſuch as the *World* and the Vanities of *it*; not to be debauch'd by the Devil and his Temptations, and ſhare his Heart between *Chriſt* and *Belial*: But, ſince *his* Iſa. 54. 5. *Maker is his Husband*, as the Prophet *Iſaiah* expreſſes it, to be intirely faithful to him, and admit no Creature to that Dearneſs of Affection which he alone ſhould have

For this is that Crime which the Scripture calls ſpiritual *Fornication* and *Adultery*, and which St. *Paul* told the *Corinthians*, he began to fear they were guilty of; *I am jealous over you*, ſays he, *with a Godly Jealouſie, for I have eſpous'd you to one Husband, that I may preſent you as a chaſte Virgin unto Chriſt: But I fear, leſt by any means, as the Serpent beguiled* Eve *through his Subtilty, ſo your Minds ſhould be corrupted from the Simplicity*, or Purity and Integrity, *that is towards Chriſt*, 2 *Cor.* 11. 1, 2. This is that *Fornication*

cation for which Chriſt will give us a Bill of Divorcement, and for ever put us away from him; *depart from me ye curſed*, &c. *Mat.* 25. 41. This is in a ſpiritual Senſe, *to take the Members of Chriſt and make them the Members of an Harlot*; and theſe *ſpiritual* as well as *carnal Whoremongers and Adulterers, God will judge.* And therefore, as much as it concerns us to *continue* in this near and deareſt Relation to Chriſt, which is attended with ſuch ineſtimable Privileges; ſo much it concerns us to bear an *intire* and *unſpotted* Love to him; *for he hath bought us with a Price, therefore we ſhould glorifie him in our Bodies and our Spirits which are his.*

Secondly, As a Wife is bound to *ſubmit* her ſelf to her Husband, to *comply* with his *Government*, and *reverence* his *Perſon* and *Authority*; ſo, and much *more* is every *Believer* bound to do to *Chriſt*. That is, to be *ſatisfied* with the Diſpoſals of his *Providence*, to *ſubmit* to his *Guidance* and *Conduct*, to *reverence* all the Expreſſes of his *good Pleaſure*, to be in *Subjection* to his holy *Diſcipline*, to have one *Will* with him, the ſame Likes and Diſlikes, and in no Caſe to oppoſe or reſiſt his Sovereign Authority.

This is no more than what the Apoſtles command from a *Woman* to her *Husband*, (as every one that has read their Writings knows very well) and that though they are both alike, *frail ſinful Mortals*, much more then ought we to be *ſubject*, and bear the profoundeſt *Reverence* to *Chriſt our Saviour*,

who is the *King of Glory, the Son of God, who upholds all things by the Word of his Power and ſits on the right Hand of the Majeſty on high*; whom all the Angels of God worſhip, and who beſides, is moſt *tender* and *affectionate* to *us*, and his Government directed by *infinite Wiſdom*.

Thirdly, As a Wife ought not only to be ſubject to the Diſpoſals of her Husband, and *paſſively* obedient, but likewiſe *actively* ſo, and ready chearfully to *obey his Commands*; ſo ought every *Believer* to be to *Chriſt*.

Indeed, *this* is the main Tryal of *true conjugal* Affection, and is the beſt Demonſtration of the *Sincerity* of all other Shews of Love and Fidelity, and Reverence and Submiſſion. For where *true* Love, Reverence and Submiſſion is, a *chearful Obedience* will ſurely follow; and on the contrary, where there is no willing *chearful Obedience*, there is but very *little*, if *any* ſincere *Affection*. And therefore, ſays our dear Lord, *if ye love me keep my Commandments: And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I ſay?* And of *Sarah* 'tis ſaid, ſhe *obey'd Abraham* as well as call'd him *Lord*. And St. *John* agreeably, 1 *John* 2. 5. *whoſo keepeth his Word, in him verily is the Love of God perfected; and hereby know we that we are in him.* And therefore, *Obedience* to the *Commands* of this our glorious Husband, is above all things neceſſary to continue that our near Relation to him; *and his Commandments are not grievous*, but *his Yoke is eaſie and*

and his Burthen light : And 'twould be *ſtrange* if we ſhould not obey *him*, who commands us nothing but what is in its own *Nature* neceſſary in order to our Happineſs in both Worlds.

In the *laſt* place, the Goſpel is productive of like *Effects* to thoſe of Marriage, and from this ſo *near* Relation of Believers to Chriſt proceeds the Increaſe of ſuch as ſhall be the *Children* of God, a numerous Progeny to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, and fill up the Vacancies left by the Fall of the rebellious Angels.

Thus our Lord calls the becoming *Chriſtian's* a being *born again*, *John* 3. 3. and teaches us when we pray to *God* to ſay *Our Father*. And St. *Paul* agreeably, in a Quotation from the Prophet *Jeremiah*, ſays, as in the Perſon of God, *I will be a Father unto you, and ye ſhall be my Sons and Daughters, ſaith the Lord Almighty*. And the *Jeruſalem* which is from above, or the Chriſtian Church, is ſaid to be *the Mother of us all*, *Gal.* 4. 26. and Chap. 3. 26. *we are all the Children of God by Chriſt Jeſus*. And if Children then *Heirs*, *Heirs of God and joynt Heirs with Chriſt*, of that glorious Kingdom of his which is not of *this* World, but eternal in the Heavens. *Well* therefore may we cry out with Admiration, as St. *John* does, *Behold what manner of Love the Father hath beſtow'd upon us that we ſhould be call'd the Sons of God! And every Man that hath this Hope in him*, of being receiv'd into the Bo-

2 Cor. 6. 18.

1 John 3. 1.

ſom of his heavenly Father, and *ſeeing him as he is; muſt purifie himſelf even as he is pure*: And having ſuch glorious Expectations, *cleanſe himſelf from all Filthyneſs, both of Fleſh and Spirit, perfecting Holyneſs in the Fear of God*, 2*Cor.* 7. 1.

This then is the *Nature* of the *Goſpel*; 'tis as a *Marriage* between *Chriſt* and Believers. There is one thing more to be conſider'd under this *firſt* General, namely, who they are that are admitted to the Joys and Happineſs of this bleſſed Condition? They are deſcrib'd in the Parable by the *poor* and the *maim'd*, the *halt* and the *blind*. And truly, juſt ſuch was Man's Condition, before God was pleaſed to call him to this *happy Marriage*. Deſpicably *poor* we were, and deſtitute of any real Excellency that could recommend us to the Favour of God; our Souls were like a parch'd and barren Wilderneſs, burnt up with vile Luſts and Paſſions, no Fruits of Holineſs appearing, but drawing ſtill nearer and nearer to everlaſting Perdition. *Maim'd* we were in all our Faculties by our frequent deſperate Falls from our Obedience to God, and full of *Wounds and Bruiſes and putrifying Sores*; and our beſt Performances very *lame* and imperfect, like the *Haltings* of a Cripple; and our *Underſtandings* withall *blinded* by the Deceitfulneſs of Sin, which put out that Candle of the Lord, and made it uncapable of directing us in the right Way that leads to Happineſs, ſo that we lay groping in the *Dark*,

Dark, ſurrounded with *Terrors*, rack'd by *Uncertainties*, miſerably poor and indigent, and utterly unable to help our ſelves. When lo! There aroſe up a *Light* in this Darkneſs, and through the infinite Mercy of our God the *Day-ſpring from on high* did viſit us, we were pitied and commiſerated by the Father of Mercies, and in this forlorn Condition, call'd to partake of the ineffable Joys and Felicities that attend the neareſt and deareſt Relation to the *Son of God*. *The Lord anointed him to preach the Goſpel to the poor; he ſent him to heal the broken-hearted, to preach Deliverance to the captives, and Recovery of Sight to the blind, and to ſet at Liberty them that are bruiſed*, Luke 4. 18. And accordingly, he *inrich'd* our Poverty, *reſtor'd* our Sight, *heal'd* our Bruiſes, and *confirm'd* our Strength, *and of his Fulneſs have we all receiv'd*; and nothing for the Future can ever make us miſerable but *our ſelves*

Wherefore, as we ſhould adore and magnifie, with all our Souls, the wondrous Goodneſs and Compaſſion of God and our Saviour, in receiving ſuch wretched *polluted* Creatures as we were by Nature, into ſo *intimate* a Relation to himſelf, and making us Partakers of the Comforts of his bleſſed Spirit in this World, and providing Crowns of Glory for us in the next: So above all things ſhould we dread to fall back into the ſame Condition again, *and work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling*. For otherwiſe, 'twould have been better for us never

to have taſted of the divine Compaſſion in ſo extraordinary a Manner as we have done, and our latter End will be worſe than our Beginning.

And thus much for the firſt thing to be conſider'd in this Parable, namely, the *Nature* of the *Goſpel* or Chriſtian Religion, repreſented by the *Marriage of a King's Son*, and the *poor* and the *maim'd*, the *halt* and the *blind* being call'd in to partake of the Joys and Feſtivities of that great Solemnity. I proceed now to the

Second thing to be conſider'd, namely, God's great Care in having this Goſpel *preach'd*, this Religion publiſh'd and *made known* to all Men, and his repeated *Invitations* to all Men to *embrace* it; repreſented by that King's *ſending forth his Servants to call thoſe that were bidden to the Wedding, and again ſending other Servants*, and commanding them to tell thoſe that were bidden, *that he had prepar'd and made all things ready*, and therefore to *urge them to come unto the Marriage.*

How great God's Care has been that this Goſpel ſhould be *publiſh'd*, and how *repeated* his Invitations to Men have been, that they would embrace it; is evident from the whole Story of the *firſt* planting of the Goſpel, and from the Courſe, that by God's Appointment, has been taken *ever ſince.* At *firſt*, many were endow'd with very extraordinary Abilities for this Purpoſe, ſuch as the Gift of *Tongues*, whereby they were enabled

enabled wherever they ſhould go, to preach the Goſpel to Men in their own native Language; and a Power of working Miracles to confirm the *Truth* of their Doctrin; and with this Meſſage and theſe ſupernatural Abilities, were they ſent to the moſt remote Corners of the Earth; even our *Britain*, as little *known*, and as *barbarous* as *then* it was, receiv'd, and that very *early*, the glad Tidings of the Goſpel. And for a Supply of the *Mortality* of the firſt Teachers of this holy Religion, that no Age might want thoſe that ſhould inſtruct Men in, and invite them to it, there was an Order of Men ſet apart on purpoſe for this great Work, and empower'd to ordain others that ſhould tread in their Steps when they were gone, and thoſe likewiſe *others*, and ſo down ſucceſſively till Time ſhall be no more; and as ſo many Ambaſſadors from the great King of Heaven to perſwade Men to hearken to the Propoſals of Reconciliation made to them through the Merits and Interceſſion of his Son, and to partake of the infinite *Happineſs* that will follow upon that bleſſed *Agreement*.

Theſe, like the King's Servants in the Parable, are to let Men know, what *Bliſs* will be the Reſult of their coming to this ſpiritual Marriage, and entring into ſo near a Relation to the eternal Son of God; that all things are ready to compleat that glorious Solemnity, the Feaſt prepar'd, the Oxen and Fatlings kill'd, *i. e.* Heaven and the ineffable

ineffable Pleaſures of it ready to receive thoſe that ſhall ſincerely enter into this near Relation to Chriſt, and continue always faithful in it; and in the mean time the ſecret Joys of a good Conſcience, and the enraviſhing Expectation of the Time when thoſe Felicities ſhall be enjoy'd, ſhall unſpeakably cheer and refreſh the Soul, and be as ſo many *Antepaſts of Glory.*

This is like the Courſe that the Lord took with the obſtinate Jews, mention'd *Jer.* 25. 4. *He ſent unto them all his Servants, the Prophets riſing early and ſending them,* they cry'd, *Turn ye again now every one from his evil Way, and from the Evil of your Doings, and dwell in the Land that the Lord hath given to you, and to your Fathers for ever; for why will ye dye O Houſe of* Iſrael! Many the like pathetick Expreſſions there are in Scripture of God's great Deſire of the Happineſs of Mankind, and as earneſt *Intreaties* that we would accept of thoſe ineſtimable Favours he would confer upon us, if *we* were to *confer* the Favours, and *he* to receive them.

Now, when we conſider the infinite Diſtance between *God* and *us*, what *deſpicable* Creatures comparatively the beſt of us are, *poor* and *maim'd*, *halt* and *blind*, as the Parable expreſſes it; how infinitely *perfect* and *happy* the *divine Nature* is, and would for *ever* be, though the whole Creation were *annihilated*; ſo that *our* Righteouſneſs will not reach to *him* to make any *Addition*

to

to *his Felicity*, nor will it be in the leaſt *profitable to him that we make our Way perfect*; and if we conſider likewiſe our great *Rebellions* againſt him, *obſtinately* perſiſted in even until *now*, the little *Deſire* we have of his Favour, the many Slights that we have made of his Overtures of Peace and the like: We ſhall ſoon perceive, that his *Mercy* is indeed *over all his Works*, and that his Compaſſions fail not as long as there is any Hopes of our complying with his gracious Intentions for our Happineſs. And ſuch *ſtupendious* Goodneſs as this, to Creatures in our vile Circumſtances, can never be enough ador'd and magnifyed. Only let us remember, that the greater the Expreſſions are of God's *Love* and *Tenderneſs* to Sinners, the greater will be his *Anger*, the more ſevere his *Vengeance* to ſuch as finally *reject* it, and obſtinately *perſiſt* in their Rebellion againſt him.

The *Third* thing expreſs'd in this Parable, is what Kind of *Reception* the Goſpel and the Teachers of it are like to meet with in the World, repreſented by Men's making *light* of the King's Invitation to the Marriage of his Son, and offering frivolous *Excuſes*, ſuch as *of having bought a Piece of Ground, and a Yoke of Oxen*, and *of having married a Wife*, and that theſe things would engage 'em ſo that they could not come; and accordingly going their Way, *one to his Merchandiſe, another to his Farm*, and the reſt taking thoſe Servants that came to invite them,

them, and *intreating them deſpightfully and ſlaying them.*

In general, *ſlighting* and *undervaluing* the glad Tidings of the *Goſpel*, *was*, and *is ſtill* and is too like *to be* the *Reception* of it; Men's Luſts and vile Affections diſſuading them from embracing ſo *holy* a Religion, and the *Evil of their Deeds* making them *love Darkneſs rather than* this glorious *Light*, which will *diſcover* and *reprove* them. And Men having ſo little Reliſh for the *Religion*, have as little *Reſpect* for thoſe that *preach* and *enforce* it, and endeavour to *ſilence* and *diſcourage* them by their malicious ill Treatment of them; like thoſe in the Parable, who took the King's Servants and entreated them ſpitefully and ſlew them. And, as in this Caſe it ſeems very ſtrange, that thoſe who came upon ſo *friendly* an Errand as to invite to the Pleaſures and Feſtivities of ſo great a Marriage as that of a King's Son, ſhould be treated ſo inhumanely in Return; ſo methinks, 'tis as ſtrange, that thoſe whom God has ſent to invite Men to their *Happineſs*, and to prepare them for the Enjoyment of himſelf in Glory, ſhould be us'd like ſo many *Enemies*, and deſpis'd as the *Peſts* of Society, and the *Offscouring of the Earth.*

But *ſo* it is too generally, and the Reaſon muſt be this, as St. *Paul* expreſſes it, *we are therefore look'd upon as Men's Enemies becauſe we tell them the Truth.* Becauſe we tell 'em they muſt *love God above all things*, and

and not be too *fond* of the *World*, and deny and mortifie the unruly Paſſions and Deſires of the Body, and lead this preſent Life in *Sobriety*, *Righteouſneſs* and *Godlineſs*, if they hope to partake of the Joys of Heaven; therefore we are *the Troublers of* Iſrael, as King *Ahab* ſaid to *Elijah*, and as ſuch, made the Object of Men's *Scorn* and *Hate*. But, as our Lord takes all the *Kindneſs*, Reverence and Reſpect which his Miniſters receive as done unto *himſelf* (the Treatment of an Ambaſſador being look'd upon as the Treatment of the Prince that ſends him, *and we are the Ambaſſadors of Chriſt*) ſo on the contrary, he that ſhall treat *deſpightfully* the *leaſt* of theſe his Servants, *'twere better for him that a Milſtone were hang'd about his Neck, and he caſt into the Midſt of the Sea.* But of this ſomething more in the Sequel.

Let us now conſider the *Excuſes* thoſe in the Parable made for their not going to the Marriage of the King's Son (and which are offer'd *ſtill* by irreligious Men) and the great *Weakneſs* and Invalidity of them.

The firſt two, of having bought a Piece of Ground, and a Yoke of Oxen, and going to ſee the one and prove the other are much the *ſame*, and ſo ſhall be conſider'd together, and they both amount to thus much, that they preferr'd the minding their own *petty* Affairs (and which might have been as well let alone till another Time) before that great Honour the King did them in inviting them to the *Marriage of his Son*: And they might

might well believe ſuch Excuſes would ſerve to no other Purpoſe but to provoke the King to *Anger*, when he ſhould ſee his Favour made thus light of, and Men's common Buſineſs preferr'd before it.

In like manner, too many *now-adays* are ſo weak as to plead *Buſineſs*, and the Affairs of the World, in excuſe of their great Neglect of the things of *Religion:* Our Callings muſt be follow'd, Buſineſs muſt be done, our Families muſt be maintain'd, and therefore it cannot be expected that we can be *much* at *Leiſure* for *Religion* at the *preſent*; when the Fatigues of *this* World begin to be *over*, and we draw near the *other*, *then* we'll give our ſelves up to the making *Proviſion* for it. And this, though few Men will *ſpeak it out*, is the Senſe of too many as is evident from their *Practice*; and truly ſome make no Scruple to declare this *openly*. Now, though it be very true that Buſineſs muſt be minded, and our Families maintain'd, and *Induſtry* is as much a Chriſtian Duty as any other, and is it ſelf a Part of Piety; yet it is but a *Part*, and will not commute for a Neglect of all the reſt; nay, this *Sort* of Induſtry we are ſpeaking of, is one of the *leaſt* Parts of Piety, and provided the *Neceſſaries* of Life are ſecur'd, 'tis not only *lawful*, but very *commendable* to abate of our Induſtry in the Perſuit of *this* World's Good, and lay it out upon the greater Concerns of the *next*. Thus when Jeſus came to the Houſe of *Martha* and *Mary*, and *Martha*, out of a commendable

mendable Zeal to entertain him well, was buſied in making ready Proviſions for him, while *Mary* ſet at his Feet liſtning to his divine Inſtructions; when *Martha* complain'd to him that her Siſter had left all the Trouble to her, and deſir'd him to order that ſhe ſhould help her: Jeſus anſwer'd and ſaid unto her, Martha, Martha, *thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is* above all *needful, and Mary hath choſen that good Part which ſhall not be taken from her*, Luk. 10. 40 *&c.*

And accordingly, in his divine Sermon on the Mount, *Mat. 6. 24, 25. ye cannot ſerve God and Mammon*, ſays our Lord; *therefore take no Thought, i. e* no anxious, over eager Concern, *for your Life, what ye ſhall eat or drink, or wherewith be cloathed*, but Verſ. 33. *ſeek ye firſt the Kingdom of God and his Righteouſneſs, and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you, for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all theſe things.* Seek ye *firſt* the Kingdom of God and his Righteouſneſs, let it be your *principle* Care and Endeavour to be rich *towards God*, and abound in *good Works*, and then a *moderate* Care for the things of *this* Life, will, with God's Bleſſing, which alone can give Proſperity, be ſufficient. And therefore, to do as is too commonly done in the World, and firſt provide, with great Care and Induſtry, for Abundance *here*, and then at laſt think a little of the *Kingdom of God and his Righteouſneſs*, is ſuch an ungodly and unreaſonable

unreaſonable Courſe, as can never end in any thing but bitter Remorſe at laſt, and utter Confuſion; ſo vain and frivolous is this firſt Excuſe Men offer for their not entertaining Religion ſo affectionately as they ſhould do, namely, that they have bought Farms and Oxen and muſt look after *them*, *i. e.* are deeply engag'd in the Affairs and Buſineſs of *this Life*.

The other Excuſe offer'd in the Parable for abſenting from the Marriage of the King's Son, was the having *married a Wife*; the Man was ſo taken up with the Pleaſures of his *own* new Condition, that he had no Appetite for thoſe at the King's Son's Wedding.

And *this*, as little of Validity as it has in it, is in Effect very often pleaded by Men, againſt their medling with *Religion* at leaſt at *preſent*. They are *young* they ſay, and in the Age of Pleaſure and Jollity; the Enjoyments of the *World* are very *ſweet* to 'em, and Religion is too *auſtere* for them as *yet*; what *Pleaſures* are ſaid to be in it are of a Nature *contrary* to their *Propenſions* and Inclinations; and therefore they deſire to be excus'd if they don't leave theſe preſent Satisfactions but enjoy them while they can, and *afterwards* 'tis likely they may advert to the Pleaſures of *Religion*, which, though they have heard ſo much *Talk* of, they can't frame any ſo lovely Idea of them, as to incline them to leave what by *Experience* they find ſo grateful to them. And this, not only

ly the *Practice* of moſt younger Perſons expreſſes, but many are ſo forſaken of Reaſon as to *own* it *plainly*.

But, ſince they talk of *Experience*, I dare appeal even to *themſelves*, whether they have not met with more *Diſappointment* than *Satisfaction*, from the greateſt ſenſual Pleaſures they have enjoy'd? The thing is too *notorious* to be *deny'd*; and they *tacitly* confeſs it by *ſhifting* Pleaſures ſo often as they do, for where there is *Satisfaction*, what need of *Change?* And I may likewiſe *boldly* aſſert *this*, from the Experience of very many that have taſted both Sorts of Pleaſures, thoſe of the *World* as well as of *Religion*, that there is no Compariſon between the one and the other, and that the Satisfaction that flowes from a *ſincere Religion*, is infinitely to be preferr'd before the moſt *ſtudied* Gratifications of Senſe; nay, even thoſe Pleaſures of Senſe reliſh much better for being ſeaſon'd with Religion: So that to neglect *Religion* out of a Fondneſs for *Pleaſure*, is as if a Man ſhould run from a *Fountain* becauſe he is parch'd with *Thirſt*. No Pleaſures certainly like thoſe of *Religion*, and he that once drinks of thoſe Rivers of Delight that flow from *her*, will never thirſt again after the tainted Puddles of *brutal* Enjoyments, for *her* Ways only are Ways of ſincere and *unmix'd* Pleaſure, and *all* her Paths are *Peace*.

But ſuppoſing the Pleaſures of this World to be *indeed* as great, as ſome Men, after all

their *Baulks* and *Disappointments*, will still *fancy* them to be; and that Religion is an *austere* and *rugged* thing, and but little or no Delight and Satisfaction to be met with in the Practice of it; yet, since the Pleasures of the *World*, how *great* soever, are very short and momentary, and must certainly *die with* us, and generally leave us long *before* we die; and since *Religion*, how unpleasant soever here, will secure to us the Enjoyment of unconceivable Pleasures that are for ever in the Presence of God: No rational Man but will think it a very childish Excuse for the Neglect of *Religion* to plead our Fondness of the Gaieties and Enjoyments of *this* World. 'Tis like a Child's slighting a Wedge of Gold, and rather pursuing an *empty* Bubble because it shines and *glitters*.

So utterly without Excuse are those who despise and reject the Offers of the Gospel and the Invitations to *Religion*, upon Account of the Riches and Pleasures of the *World*; or indeed upon any other Account whatever: For, Religion is our *chief* Interest, and therefore nothing can stand in Competition with it. Those that *put by* the Thoughts of it till a more *convenient* Time, that is, till they are fit for nothing else, are no doubt very highly displeasing to the great Author of it; but those are much *more* so, who totally and *insultingly reject* it. To *defer* the great Business of Religion is a very heinous Provocation; but atheistically

ly to *oppose* and vilifie it is certainly much worse. Which leads me to the

Fourth thing expres'd in this Parable, namely, the Sadness of their Condition, who, when they have *heard* of, either totally *reject* this holy Religion, and abuse those that invite them to embrace it; or else, though they *profess* it, are negligent of its *Duties*, and live not *agreeably* to it. The *first* of these is represented by the King's being *Wroth* with those that made *light* of and complyed not with his Invitation to the Marriage of his Son, and pronouncing them *unworthy* of that *Favour*, and that they should *not taste of his Supper*, and sending his Servants to invite *others* to the Wedding; and commanding his Armies to go and *destroy* those Murderers, that had *spitefully entreated and slain his Servants*, who brought the gracious Invitation to them, and to *burn up their City*.

And indeed, well may God's Wrath be kindled against those that reject these wondrous Expressions of his Love, and trample under Foot the Son of God, and despise and vilifie his holy Religion, and undervalue all his Condescentions, and use his Ambassadors despitefully, and call the whole a *Trick*, a State Juggle, and glory in their Infidelity, and too often *blaspheme* that blessed Jesus, by whom alone cometh Salvation.

These Men will do well to consider, that if it should prove *true*, that there is no other Name by which we can be sav'd but that of

Jesus, *their* Case will be infinitely miserable who have *not believ'd* in that Name, but made it their Business to prophane and *ridicule* it as much as was possible; but should it prove *not true*, their Belief in it will not at all be *injurious* to them either in *this* world or in the *next* should there be any after this. And therefore, since the wittiest Infidel in the World cannot prove but that 'tis *possible*, and *may* be *true*, that Jesus is the only Saviour of the World, and the Consequence of *not* believing in him, being so sad should it at length prove indeed to *be true*; certainly it must be the most *prudent* Course to be of the *surest* Side, and embrace that Faith, which if *true*, is the only Way to Happiness; and if *false*, will not however *leave* a Man in any Respect in a worse Condition than it found him.

How *sad* the *Consequence* will be of not believing in Jesus as the only Saviour of the World, and of rejecting the Religion he taught, is express'd in this Parable by the King's pronouncing those that would not come to the Marriage of his Son, to be *unworthy* of that Favour, and resolving that they *should not taste of his Supper*, and sending his Servants to invite *others* to the Wedding: Which was *literally* verifyed upon the *obstinate Jews*, and will be as *effectually* upon all *other Infidels*. That is, Men's obstinate Infidelity shall at length be repay'd with God's *withdrawing* that Favour which he so long *tender'd* them and they *refus'd*, and

and putting an End to their Day of Grace and Salvation, and *ſealing* 'em up (as irreclaimable) to Deſtruction. *Becauſe I have called and ye refuſed* (ſays *Solomon*, perſonating *Chriſt* or the Divine Wiſdom) *I have ſtretch'd out my Hand and no Man regarded, but ye have ſet at nought my Counſel, and would have none of my Reproof; I alſo will laugh at your Calamity and mock when your Fear cometh; when your Fear cometh as Deſolation, and your Deſtruction as a Whirlwind; when Diſtreſs and Anguiſh cometh upon you, then ſhall they call upon me but I will not anſwer, they ſhall ſeek me early but they ſhall not find me*, Prov. 1. 24. *The things that belonged to their Peace*, which *once* were tender'd and made known to them, *ſhall then be hid from their Eyes*. And no Condition can be ſo miſerable as theirs, who by obſtinate Infidelity, put themſelves out of all *Poſſibility* of Salvation.

The ſad Conſequence of uſing thoſe ſpiritual Perſons contumelioufly and deſpitefully who come as *Ambaſſadors* from God with theſe glad Tidings of Salvation, is expreſs'd in the Parable, by the King's *ſending forth his Armies to deſtroy thoſe Murderers and to burn up their City*; which was likewiſe *literally* fulfill'd in the Deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*, and ſhall be as effectually verify'd upon thoſe wicked Men who vent their *Spleen* againſt the *Religion* upon thoſe that *preach* it, and vilifie and abuſe and trample upon the one becauſe they hate the other. But Ven-

geance is mine, I will repay, ſaith the Lord; and a fiery Deſtruction, even that of Hell, ſhall (without a deep Repentance, which we beſeech God to grant them) be the Portion of thoſe whoſe Malice was ſo inveterate againſt Men ſent from God to invite them to *Salvation*.

This is the Caſe of ſuch, as when they have heard, totally *reject* this holy Religion, and *abuſe* and vilifie thoſe that perſwade them to embrace it. And theirs is as bad, who, though they *profeſs* it, are negligent of its *Duties*, and live not *agreeably* to it: Which is expreſs'd in the Parable by a King's finding *a Man at the Marriage Supper that had not on a Wedding Garment, and ſaying unto him, Friend, how cameſt thou in hither not having on a Wedding Garment?* And the Man's being *ſpeechleſs* upon it, and the King's commanding his Servants *to bind him Hand and Foot and take him away and caſt him into outer Darkneſs, where ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of Teeth.*

This is in Alluſion to what was cuſtomary in thoſe Eaſtern Countries, the having peculiar *florid* Sort of Garments, on purpoſe to grace ſuch feſtival Solemnities, and none being permitted to taſte of thoſe Feaſts, but who had ſuch Garments on.

So in *Chriſtianity*, *Repentance* and Reformation of Life are the *Wedding Garment*, without which *none*, let them make never ſo ſpecious *Profeſſions*, ſhall taſte of that Happineſs which is propos'd as the Reward of believing

believing in Jeſus. *Faith* without *Works* is *dead*; the Soul without *Repentance* is *polluted*, whatever it profeſſes to *believe*; and without real and ſubſtantial *Holineſs* no Man ſhall *ſee the Lord*. And when at the great Scrutiny in the laſt Day, God ſhall take a *View* of every Man, of the State and Condition of his Soul, that every Man may be diſpoſed of according to his Deſerts; and ſhall ask thoſe formal *Profeſſors* who have liv'd like *Heathens*, or as if *Faith alone* could ſave them, and took no Care of good Works, How came *you* in hither? How came *you* into this Society of Chriſtians not having on the Wedding Garment? What will they be able to ſay in their Excuſe? Will they not be like him in the Parable, confounded and aſhamed, and utterly *ſpeechleſs!* What will they have to plead in Bar of that dire Sentence which will then be paſt upon them, *bind them Hand and Foot and take them away*, &c. certainly *nothing*, but with inexpreſſible Horror and Deſpair and *Self-Condemnation* muſt ſubmit to their ſad Puniſhment.

From all this, there is in the *laſt* Place this general *Obſervation* drawn, that *many are call'd, but few choſen*. The plain Meaning of which, I ſuppoſe, to be this.

That though the Goſpel is preach'd to Myriads of People, and all that hear of it are *invited* alike to *embrace* it, and 'tis God's good Pleaſure that *all* ſhould *be ſav'd, and come to the Knowledg of the Truth*: Yet the

most will make a very ill Use of their Liberty of Choice; and *many* utterly *reject* this Invitation; and more, though they do *embrace* it, yet become never the *better* for it, by not leading their Lives agreeably to their holy Profession. And by this means, among the *many* that are *call'd*, there will be but *few* that will approve themselves to God as *elect* or *choice* and *right good* Christians, and but *few* consequently, that will enter into the eternal Joy of their Lord; according to what our Lord said in another Place, *strait is the Gate and narrow is the Way that leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it.*

Wherefore, to conclude this Parable. As we have all of us been *call'd* and *invited* to a sincere Faith in, and intire Obedience to the holy Jesus, and do make open *Profession* of such *Faith*, and *Shew* of such *Obedience*; it concerns us as much as our Souls are worth, and as we would avoid that *outer Darkness* where is eternal *weeping and gnashing of Teeth*; to take all possible Care that our Faith be so *sincere* and *lively* as to produce *good Works*, such as may *make our Calling and Election sure.* Not to rest contented with the *Form* of Godliness, or outward *Profession* of Christianity, but to endeavour after the *Power* of it and lead our Lives according to our Belief; to imitate our Lord's most blessed Example, and obey all his holy Precepts, and submit to the Disposals of his Providence chearfully, and bear

bear unſpotted Love and Fidelity to him through the whole Courſe of our Lives. And by this means ſhall we be reckon'd among his *choice Jewels, elect and precious*, and be receiv'd into the *neareſt* and *deareſt*, and even an *inſeparable* Relation to him; and when this Life's at an End, be conducted by his Angels into his *glorious Preſence*, there to ſhare in his *Happineſs* to eternal Ages.

The PRAYER.

MOST bleſſed God, the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who in infinite Mercy, and amazing Condeſcenſion haſt invited me miſerable Creature (though poor and maim'd, halt and blind, and deſtitute of every thing that may recommend me to thee, except it be my Wretchedneſs) to the moſt intimate Union with thy glorious Son; and as the Bride of that divine Bridegroom to enjoy his Love, and be bleſſed with his tendereſt Regard, his Protection and Defence, and to partake of his Honour and Glory and Happineſs: How can I enough praiſe and magnifie this thy wondrous Goodneſs! And with what Tranſports of Joy ſhould I embrace ſo ineſtimable a Favour! But I alas! ſtupid as I am, and bewitch'd with the Cares and Buſineſs and Gain and Pleaſures of this World, have hitherto ſtood in the Way of my own Happineſs,

neſs, and diſregarded this gracious Offer, and preferr'd every thing before this ſpiritual Marriage with the Son of God; or at beſt have deferr'd it ſtill till another Time, provoking thereby moſt juſtly thy Wrath and Indignation againſt me, and deſerving to be for ever excluded thy bleſſed Preſence as infinitely unworthy. But now, O Lord, I do earneſtly repent, and am heartily ſorry for ſo ungratefully ſliting ſuch infinite Mercy: The Remembrance of this Vileneſs is grievous unto me, the Burden of it is intollerable; and with the utmoſt Earneſtneſs of a troubled Spirit I beg thy heavenly Aid, that now without the leaſt Delay I may chearfully embrace the bleſſed Invitations of the Goſpel, and love and honour the Meſſengers which bring me thoſe glad Tidings; and ſince my Maker is my Husband, be always mindful of my Duty to him, and bear him unſpotted Fidelity and Love, be his intirely, and for ever ſubmit without Reſerve to his heavenly Government, reverence his Authority, and glorifie him with my Body and my Spirit which are his. And grant, O merciful God, I humbly intreat thee, that the Spirit of Infidelity may never poſſeſs my Soul, leſt I totally reject this bleſſed Invitation, or having embrac'd it, and enter'd into ſo near a Relation to my Saviour, again divorce my ſelf from him by entertaining ſtrange and forbidden Loves. And ſince I am ſo highly honour'd by the Son of God, O may I always be careful to preſerve the

Dignity

Dignity of ſo high a Calling, and not debaſe my ſelf by low ſunk brutiſh Actions; but, as befits the ſpiritual Spouſe of Chriſt, be cloath'd with the wedding Garment of ſincere Purity and Holineſs, that ſo I may never be ſeparated from my deareſt Lord, but ever enjoy the unconceivable Happineſs of his heavenly Kingdom. Which grant, O merciful Father, for the Sake of that bleſſed Jeſus. *Amen, Amen.*

PARABLE

PARABLE VI.

Of the Ten Virgins.

Matth. XXV. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13.

Then ſhall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto Ten Virgins, which took their Lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom.

And five of them were wiſe, and five were fooliſh,

They that were fooliſh took their Lamps, and took no Oil with them.

But the wiſe took Oil in their Veſſels with their Lamps.

While the Bridegroom tarried, they all ſlumbered and ſlept.

And at Midnight there was a Cry made, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him.

Then all thoſe Virgins aroſe, and trimmed their Lamps.

And

And the fooliſh ſaid unto the wiſe, Give us of your Oil; for our Lamps are gone out.

But the wiſe anſwer'd, ſaying, not ſo; leſt there be not enough for us and you, but go ye rather to them that ſell, and buy for your ſelves.

And while they went to buy, the Bridegroom came, and they that were ready, went in with him to the Marriage, and the Door was ſhut.

Afterwards came alſo the other Virgins, ſaying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

But he anſwer'd and ſaid, verily I ſay unto you, I know you not.

Watch therefore, for ye know neither the Day nor the Hour, wherein the Son of Man cometh.

THough the *firſt* Intention of this Parable, as may be probably collected from the foregoing Chapter (which is a Deſcription of the ſad State that was e'er long to overtake *Jeruſalem* for the Jews obſtinate Infidelity, and their murdering their Saviour) was to urge the Jewiſh Chriſtians to a Preparation and watchful Care againſt that Time of Sorrows; and that they would be ſo wiſe as to make Proviſion for their *Safety* by being very careful that that Time ſurprize them

them, not in *wicked Courses*; but that living, like faithful Disciples of Christ, in all Obedience to his *holy* Commands, his *Providence* might watch over them and *secure* them from *perishing* in that dreadful Destruction: Though this might be the *first* Intention of this Parable, yet I suppose it designed likewise to represent the Necessity of Men's constant Preparation for *Death* and *Judgment*, by a sedulous Care and Watchfulness over themselves, and diligent Practice of all religious Duties and Obligations; Because 'tis very *uncertain* when God will summon any of us to leave this World and appear before his *just Tribunal*, and his Call may be very *suddain* and unexpected; and because the Consequence of being *unready* and not *fit* to *obey* it, will be inexpressibly *miserable*. *Watch therefore*, says our Lord in the Conclusion of this Parable, *for ye know neither the Day nor the Hour when the Son of Man cometh*,

In my Discourse upon this Parable thus understood, I shall do *two* things.

First, I shall give a particular *Interpretation* of the Parable, and shew how aptly expressive it is of the *Sense* our Lord couch'd under it. And

Secondly, I shall urge *that* upon the *Practice* of Christians which is express'd by it; namely, that they would *watch* and be *ready*, *because they know not the Day nor the Hour*.

First,

Firſt, I ſhall give a particular *Interpretation* of this Parable, and ſhew how aptly expreſſive it is of the Senſe our Lord couched under it.

The Parable is an Alluſion to a Cuſtom among the *Jews*, of the *Friends* and Neighbours of the *Bridegroom* when there was a Wedding, conducting him to the *Bride-Chamber* with *Songs* and burning *Lamps*, and partaking of an *Entertainment* that was prepar'd for them, and *ſhutting the Door* when the Bridegroom was *enter'd*, to keep out the intruding *Rabble*, and afterwards admitting *none* that were not ready to attend him at the Hour he came, which was *uncertain*. And the *Senſe* which our Lord couch'd under this Repreſentation is *this*: That 'tis highly neceſſary every Chriſtian ſhould be always *ready* and prepar'd by a *holy Life*, to attend the *Call* of Chriſt whenever he ſhall ſummon him out of this World by *Death*, in order to his final *Judgment*; becauſe the *Time* of that great Summons is ſo very *uncertain*; and eternal Happineſs or Miſery reſpectively depends upon Men's being *prepar'd* or *not* prepar'd for it. Now, how *aptly* and *movingly* expreſſive this Parable is of *this* Senſe will appear from the following *Interpretation* of it.

By the *Virgins* in the Parable is repreſented the Society of *Chriſtians*, thoſe that profeſs to *believe* in, and to be Diſciples of the holy Jeſus; who, like *Virgins*, ought to be *pure* and *ſpotleſs*, *innocent* and *modeſt* and *humble*

humble, sober and *temperate in all things, pious* and *devout*, and the like: And as the *Want* of these or any of these good Qualifications, is to a *Virgin* the greatest *Blackening* and Disfiguration, so the *Want* of them in [illegible] I likewise the greatest *Dispo*[illegible] exposes them to the Scorn [illegible] of God and all good *Men*; ren[illegible] of that *holy Name* by [illegible] and *defiles* and stains [illegible] with his [illegible] be his own [illegible]

[illegible] and [illegible] *Dis*[illegible] the [illegible] some [illegible] [illegible] make [illegible] with Care [illegible] and a di[illegible] they [illegible] Christ, [illegible] he shall [illegible] is impres[illegible] which are to [illegible] to

God

God and their *Saviour*, and make them as so many *Lights* in this *dark* and *benighted* World; for ye are the *Light of the World*, says our Lord to his Disciples, therefore *let your Light so shine before Men that they may see your good Works and glorifie your Father which is in Heaven*, Mat. 5. 14, 16. That is, as the Souls of Christians are *illuminated* by the *Spirit* of him who is the *Father of Lights*, and in whom is no Darkness at all; as they are *warm'd* by his Influences who descended upon the Apostles in the Likeness of *Fire*, and have *divine Affections*, by his holy Breathings inkindled in them; so they should influence the *whole Man*, and make those that name the Name of Christ like so many burning and shining Lights in the Midst of a crooked and perverse Generation, so many *eminent* Examples of Piety and *real* Goodness; *such*, as by theis own *Practice* should recommend their most hloy Religion, and set before Men's Eyes the *Beauty of Holiness* by their own *Conversation*.

By the *Bridegroom*, whom these *Virgins* with their *Lamps* went forth to meet, is represented our dear *Saviour*, that heavenly King's divine Son, for whom he made so glorious a Marriage in the Parable I last discours'd of; where the Reasons why the Gospel is compar'd to a Marriage and our Lord to a Bridegroom are particularly insisted on. And by going forth to *meet* this divine Bridegroom is signifyed our *preparing* against his calling us from this World by

humble, sober and *temperate in all things, pious* and *devout*, and the like: And as the *Want* of these or any of these good Qualifications, is to a *Virgin* the greatest *Blackening* and Disparagement, so the *Want* of them in *Christians* is likewise the greatest *Dishonour* to *them*; exposes them to the Scorn and *Contempt* of God and all *good Men*; renders them *unworthy* of that *holy Name* by which they are call'd, and *defiles* and stains those Souls which Christ *purified* with his *precious Blood*, that they might be his own *Peculiar*, *zealous of good Works*.

By *half* of those *Virgins* being *wise* and half *foolish*, is represented the great *Difference* there is among those that go under the same general Character of *Christians*; some *vain* and *idle*, *careless* and *unthoughtful*, taken up with the *Gaieties* and Follies of the *World*, lavish of their *Reputation*, and *loose* in their Conversation and *Behaviour*, while others are so *wise* as to consider the *Character* they bear, and live as those that make Profession of *Holiness*; that is, with Care and *Circumspection*, Watchfulness, and a diligent and *attentive* Piety: That so they may preserve their *Honour* and the *Dignity* of their *Profession*, inviolate and *unstain'd*, and be presented as *chaste Virgins* unto Christ, that divine *Bridegroom*, whenever he shall come.

By the *Lamps* of those Virgins, is expressed the *Souls* of Christians, which are to burn with holy Fires of *Love* and *Devotion* to

God

God and their *Saviour*, and make them as ſo many *Lights* in this *dark* and *benighted* World; for ye are the *Light of the World*, ſays our Lord to his Diſciples, therefore *let your Light ſo ſhine before Men that they may ſee your good Works and glorifie your Father which is in Heaven*, Mat. 5. 14, 16. That is, as the Souls of Chriſtians are *illuminated* by the *Spirit* of him who is the *Father of Lights*, and in whom is no Darkneſs at all; as they are *warm'd* by his Influences who deſcended upon the Apoſtles in the Likeneſs of *Fire*, and have *divine Affections*, by his holy Breathings inkindled in them; ſo they ſhould influence the *whole Man*, and make thoſe that name the Name of Chriſt like ſo many burning and ſhining Lights in the Midſt of a crooked and perverſe Generation, ſo many *eminent* Examples of Piety and *real* Goodneſs; *ſuch*, as by theis own *Practice* ſhould recommend their moſt hloy Religion, and ſet before Men's Eyes the *Beauty of Holineſs* by their own *Converſation*.

By the *Bridegroom*, whom theſe *Virgins* with their *Lamps* went forth to meet, is repreſented our dear *Saviour*, that heavenly King's divine Son, for whom he made ſo glorious a Marriage in the Parable I laſt diſcours'd of; where the Reaſons why the Goſpel is compar'd to a Marriage and our Lord to a Bridegroom are particularly inſiſted on. And by going forth to *meet* this divine Bridegroom is ſignifyed our *preparing* againſt his calling us from this World by

Death, and providing againſt his Advent to *Judgment*; that is, by frequently contemplating our *Mortality*, reflecting on the *Shortneſs* and *Uncertainty* of Life, and therefore making the beſt Uſe of our Time while we have it, as not knowing how ſoon our Breath may be required of us; and becauſe after Death comes *Judgment*, therefore endeavouring to make *ready* our Accounts by frequent Self-Examination, and from the ſerious Conſideration of the *Terrors* of that great Day, and the ſevere Scrutiny into our *Thoughts* as well as Words and Actions that we muſt then undergo, collecting with S. *Peter*, *what manner of Perſons we ought to be in all holy Converſation and Godlineſs, that we may be found of the great Judg in Peace*, and, as *Virgins, without Spot and blameleſs.*

2 Pet. 3. 11.

By the *Oyl* in the Virgins Lamps, and which they took with them in their Veſſels when they went to meet the Bridegroom, is repreſented the *Graces* and *Vertues* of Chriſtianity, which are the proper *Nouriſhment* of the *Soul* (that *Lamp of the Lord*, as *Solomon* calls it) and will brighten and enliven it as Plenty of Oyl does a Lamp, and make *the Way of the Juſt like a ſhining Light, ſhining more and more unto the perfect Day*; and which, when they fail, ſpiritual *Darkneſs* will follow as in a Lamp *gone out: And if the Light that is in you be Darkneſs, ſays our Lord, how great is that Darkneſs!* But the Chriſtian Vertues were very aptly repreſented by *Oyl* upon theſe further Accounts.

Firſt,

First, Because *Oyl* was generally reckoned in the eastern Countries as a great Part of a Man's *Riches*; and when they would express great *Wealth*, they do it by magnifying the Plenty of *Oyl*. Thus *Job*, when he reflected, in his Affliction, upon his former opulent Condition, the Rock (or the stone Jar that was made use of to preserve Oyl in) says he, pour'd me out *Rivers of Oyl*, Job 29. 6. And the Prophet *Micah*, when he represented the Impossibility of appeasing his offended God, even by the most *rich* and *costly* Offering, *will the Lord be pleas'd*, says he, *with ten Thousand Rivers of Oyl?* Micah 6. 7. and in Abundance of Places of Scripture the Increase of *Oyl* signifies the Increase of *Riches*. And therefore, to have a Soul plentifully stored with divine Graces and Vertues, whereby we lay up a *Treasure in Heaven* and become *rich towards God*, being the *greatest* and only *true* and *durable Riches*; is very aptly represented by having *Oyl* in our Vessels and our Lamps.

Secondly, *Oyl* was likewise among the Easterns a Symbol of the greatest *Honours*, as is evident from the whole Story of the Bible, where we read that at the solemn Consecration and Inauguration of *Kings* and Priests Oyl was always us'd, and that among the Jews by the Appointment of *God himself*; and is still in Use with us at the *Coronation* of our *Kings*. And therefore, very fit to represent those Christian Vertues which so highly *enoble* the Soul as to render

it like to God, holy as he is holy, pure as he is pure, perfect as he is perfect; and whereby through the Merits of Chriſt we
Rev. 1. 6. become *Kings and Prieſts to God, and ſhall reign with him for ever.*

Thirdly, Oyl was an Emblem of *Joy* and *Pleaſure*, and much us'd therefore in *Feaſts* and Entertainments, as is evident not only from heathen Writers, but from holy Scripture. There we read of the *Oyl of Joy and Gladneſs*; and our Lord in his Directions concerning faſting, bids his Diſciples not make a vain glorious Shew of it by an affected *Sullenneſs* and *Down Look*, diſfiguring their Faces as the Hypocrites did: But thou, when thou faſteſt, ſays he, *anoint thy Head that thou appear not unto Men to faſt*; *i. e.* make Semblance rather by this means, as if thou wert going to a *Feaſt*. And *David*, when he recounts God's Goodneſs to him, ſays amongſt other things, *thou haſt prepar'd a Table for me, thou haſt anointed my Head with Oyl and my Cup runneth over*, *Pſal.* 23. 5. which ſignifies the Happineſs of his Condition in general as well as his being advanc'd to the Throne of *Iſrael*. Many other Places there are of this Nature; but theſe are ſufficient to ſhew how fitly thoſe Chriſtian Graces are expreſs'd by *Oyl*, which cauſe the greateſt *Joy* and Satisfaction to a holy Soul, and the Practice of which is full of Pleaſure and unſpeakable Delight. *Sincere Religion* is the moſt *chearing* thing in the World, and a good Conſcience a continual Feaſt;

Feaſt: Indeed, to *rejoyce* is only proper for a *good Chriſtian*, whoſe Mind is clear and *undiſturb'd*, and in conſtant *Hope* and Expectation of the Happineſs of Heaven. But he, whoſe Mind is *rack'd* with a Senſe of his *deep Guilt*, and feels the Laſhes of an enraged Conſcience, and is terrified with the unexpreſſible Fears of *Damnation*, has little Reaſon to have *Joy* or Comfort in any thing. *Oyl* therefore, or the Emblem of *Joy* and Chearfulneſs, is of nothing more aptly expreſſive than of the Graces of our holy Religion, *whoſe* Ways *alone* are indeed *Ways of Pleaſantneſs and Joy.*

By the Virgins *all ſlumbering and ſleeping* while the Bridegroom *tarry'd*; is ſignified the *Inadvertency* and *Frailty* of even the *beſt* of Men. Becauſe this divine Bridegroom delayeth his Coming, we are all of us too apt to *lay aſide* the Thoughts of it; to think but little upon *Death* and *Judgment* as things a great Way off, and for which there will be Time enough to provide *hereafter*: And for want of due *Advertency* to theſe *rouſing* Subjects, we are apt to grow *heavy* in our Religious Performances, and ſuffer ſpiritual *Drouzineſs* to creep too much upon us. This made holy *David* call upon God ſo often to *quicken* him in his Righteouſneſs; and St *Paul* to exhort his Corinthians to *awake* to Righteouſneſs, and thus to rouze the Epheſians, *awake thou that ſleepeſt*: And Eph. 5. 14. in this ſpiritual Slumber (though the unavoidable Frailty of humane Nature will in

Part be accepted as our Excuſe by our merciful Saviour, who *knows* and pities our *Infirmities*, yet even the *beſt* of us indulge our ſelves too much, and enter into the Number of the *fooliſh* Virgins, and endanger the Extinction of our Lamp through the Decay of our Virtues, and expoſe our ſelves to many Dangers and Temptations, and frequent Falls. For this Inadvertency to that great Truth, *that the End of all things is at hand*, is one great Reaſon why even the *righteous* fall ſeven times a Day; whereas would we oftner *ſet our Lord before us* as coming to *judge the quick and the dead*, and reflect, that perhaps the next Hour our Soul may be required of us by him that gave it, and ſo an End put for ever to our State of *Probation*, and an irreverſible Sentence ſoon after be paſs'd upon us according to our Deſervings; we ſhould not dare to be ſo often *mov'd* from our Duty, but be careful and circumſpect and always upon our Guard, leſt that Day ſurprize us *unawares*, and while we drouze away our Opportunity our *Lamps go out*, and the Bridegroom call before we are ready to enter with him into the Marriage Chamber, and ſo the *Door be ſhut*.

It therefore highly concerns even the *beſt* of us, *not to ſleep as do others, but to watch and be ſober, having our Loins girded about, and our Lights burning*, as our Lord expreſſes it, and *our ſelves like unto Men that wait for their Lord when he will return from the Wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh we*

may

may open to him immediately. Blessed are those Servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find thus watching; ‖ *verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself and make them sit down to Meat*, and (after the Manner of Bridegrooms) *will come forth and serve them*; *i. e.* will impart to them the Joys and Felicities of his heavenly Kingdom. Luke 12. 35, &c. And if he shall come in the *second* or *third Watch*, that is, in the Time most addicted to Vanity and Inadvertency, as is *Youth* and *Manhood*; *Blessed* in a more especial Manner *are those Servants.* And what the Angel said to the Church of *Sardis*, *Rev.* 3. 2. is very necessary Advice even to the *best* Man living, *be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain which are ready to die; for I have not found thy Works perfect before God.* And what our Lord says, *Rev.* 16. 15. deserves to be seriously consider'd; *Behold I come as a Thief, blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his Garments, lest he walk naked and they see his Shame.*

By a *Cry being made at Midnight, behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him*; *is* very lively and movingly represented, how *unexpectedly* the Day of Judgment shall *surprize* the drouzy World, and how *suddain*, for any thing we can tell to the contrary, the Time of *our Death* may be, which is to *us* the Forerunner of it.

Midnight is a Time of great *Silence*, and destin'd to *Rest* and a Forgetfulness of the Toils and Troubles of the Day; and *then*,

ſuddain Outcries and Alarums are doubly ſcaring and affrighting, and ſeize with an inexpreſſible Confuſion, Horror and Conſternation. And thus, when Men are in the *Midſt* of their *Wickedneſs*, that ſpiritual *Night*, employ'd in Deeds of *Darkneſs*, given up to Eaſe and Luxury, and forgetful of the great Buſineſs of working out their Salvation; then ſhall that Time of Sorrows ſteal upon them as a Thief in the Night, the terrifying *Cry* ſhall be made, *behold, the great Judge of the World cometh, go ye forth to meet him:* For when they ſhall ſay *Peace* and *Safety*, ſays the Apoſtle, *Then ſuddain Deſtruction cometh upon them as Travail upon a Woman with Child, and they ſhall not eſcape*, 1 Theſ. 5. 3. *Then ſhall the Kings of the Earth and the great Men and the rich Men*, thoſe that were thought happy upon Earth, inſtead of going out *to meet* this Judg, *hide themſelves in Dens, in Rocks and Mountains, and ſay to the Mountains and Rocks, fall on us and hide us from the Face of him that ſitteth on the Throne and from the Wrath of the Lamb* for the great Day of his Wrath is come, and who ſhall be able to ſtand! *Rev.* 6. 15, 16, 17.

And no wonder if a *guilty Wretch* dreads to go *meet* his *angry Judg*; and all on the *ſuddain*, with all his Stains and *Pollutions* about him, appear before *his* Tribunal who *hateth Iniquity, and into whoſe Preſence no unclean thing can enter*: And, who is a *conſuming Fire*, to thoſe who by their *obſtinate* Impie-

ties

ties have provoked him to become their Enemy.

And ſince all this is ſo, a Man of any *Thought*, and that has any *Apprehenſion* of the *ſad* Condition of being thus *ſurpriz'd* and hurried into the other World by ſo quick and unforeſeen a Summons (which no Man is ſure ſhall not be his Caſe, ſince many have been call'd away with little or no Warning, that have no more expected than we do now) a Man of any *Thought* and Apprehenſion of things will ſurely be mov'd by ſuch Conſiderations to *ſhake off* that fatal Drouzineſs which too eaſily beſets him, and by a conſtant Attendance to his Duty and Preparation for his Departure hence, be ready chearfully to obey his great Maſter's Call, *whether at Even or at Midnight, or at the Cockcrowing, or in the Morning, leſt coming ſuddainly he find him ſleeping.*

By the *wiſe* Virgins ariſing and *trimming their Lamps* when that *Midnight Cry* was made, is repreſented the more than *ordinary* Care that even good Perſons ought to take when by *Age* or the Violence of any *Diſtemper* the Time of their Departure hence ſeems to be near approaching, to *enliven* their Piety; and by putting a *Recruit* of Oyl into their Lamps, acquiring *new* Degrees of Sanctity, and warming their Souls with greater Ardors of Devotion and holy Love, prepare to go *chearfully* to *meet their Lord. Then* is the Time, when every ſincere Chriſtian ſhould endeavour to *adorn* his Soul with all

all the Graces of the holy Religion he profeſſes, to improve every remaining Minute of his Time to this beſt of Purpoſes, to *redeem* the many Hours formerly miſpent in Vanity and Folly; and by frequent Contemplation of the infinite *Glory*, *Sanctity* and *Bliſs* of that heavenly World to which he then ſo ſenſibly draws near, inflame his Deſires of being at the End of his wearifom Journey to it; and *fit* himſelf for the *ſpiritual unſpotted* Enjoyments of that happy Place by having as little Commerce as is poſſible with this World below, and have *his Converſation in Heaven*, which will ſo quickly be the Place of his everlaſting Abode.

By the *fooliſh* Virgins ſaying to the *wiſe*; *give us of your Oyl for our Lamps are gone out*, is repreſented the *Want of Preparation* among the careleſs and *inconſiderate* for this ſo great and *ſuddain Change*; and their mighty Conſternation upon it, and the vain and inſignificant Courſes they will take in their Surprize, to make up, if poſſible, their own *Defects*, by borrowing of others that have Souls better furniſh'd with Piety than theirs. And by the *wiſe* anſwering, *not ſo, leſt there be not enough for us and you*, and bidding them go rather and *buy for themſelves*; is ſhewn that 'tis utterly *groundleſs* to expect at that great Day of Retribution, when every Man ſhall be rewarded according to his *own Works*, to fare the better for the Sanctity of *others*, and that every Man has enough to do to work out his *own* Salvation, and muſt keep

keep his *Lamp* alive with his *own Oyl*, muſt *nouriſh* his *Soul* with his *own Vertue*; for there *was* never, nor ever *ſhall* be any *meer Man* ſo holy and excellent but muſt return this ſame Anſwer as the wiſe Virgins did, to ſuch as ſhould beg them to beſtow ſome of their Vertues or Merits upon them, *not ſo, leſt there be not enough for our ſelves and you.*

¶ And if this be true, what will become of the Popiſh Doctrin of Works of *Supererrogation?* If the *beſt* Man in the World has but Vertue enough to ſecure his *own* Condition (and that through infinite *Mercy* too, and upon Account of the all-ſufficient Merits of Chriſt) where is there any left for him to beſtow upon others? But this is one of thoſe doctrins that bring much *Mony* into their *Coffers*, and therefore, right or wrong, they'l be ſure to maintain it.

By the Bridegroom's *coming* while thoſe *fooliſh* Virgins went about ſo unlikely an Employment as then immediately to furniſh their Lamps with Oyl, which before were unregarded and ſuffer'd to go out, and the *Door* before they were provided *being ſhut*; is repreſented, the *Invalidity*, *generally* ſpeaking of a *Death-Bed Repentance*; that 'tis too *late* to *begin* to be good when the *Bridegrom comes*, and thoſe that would enter with him into the *Marriage Chamber* muſt be *ready* and prepar'd by a previous Courſe of holy Living, and that for ſome *conſiderable* Time.

This

This Hurry of the fooliſh Virgins at that Time to get Oyl for their Lamps, was only the Effect of the Terrors of that *Midnight Call*; had it not been for *that*, they would have drouz'd on ſtill in their thoughtleſs Way of living, and in all Probability, had it prov'd a *falſe* Alarm, they would have return'd again to their Dream of Vanity, when this their *Fright* was a little over. And ſo it is with thoſe that think not of Repentance till *Death* and *Judgment* ſtare 'em in the Face; they are *then* wondrous ſorry for having offended God, becauſe they ſee they are like to be for ever puniſh'd for it with the Devil and his Angels; and *wiſh* they had liv'd *better*, and beg God to forgive 'em, and *promiſe* Amendment for the Time to come: But all this very ſeldom proceeds from Love to *God* or his holy *Religion*, as appears by their being as bad as ever, when God has been pleaſed to reſtore them to their former Health. But, ſuch Repentance as this is but a Piece of *Mockery*, and will not be accepted; it muſt be a real and thorough Change of Mind expreſs'd in an intire Reformation of Life and Manners that will incline God to pardon and forgive. Notwithſtanding all the Hurry of the *fooliſh Virgins* to get Oyl for their Lamps upon this ſuddain Notice of the Bridegroom's coming; becauſe their Lamps were before *ſuffer'd to go out*, we ſee the Door was *ſhut* upon them.

By

By the *wiſe* Virgins that were *ready*, their *going in with the Bridegroom to* the Marriage Feaſt; is repreſented the great Happineſs of the ſincerely good, who by holy living are *ready*, and *prepar'd* for their Departure hence into the World of Spirits. That is, as there was great Preparation made to receive the Bridegroom among the Jews and other *Eaſterns*, great Joy and Feſtivity, and which the *Children of the Bride-Chamber*, or thoſe that attended the Bridegroom, did partake of, ſinging *Epithalamiums* or nuptial Songs in Praiſe of the Bridegroom and his Bride, and rejoycing in their Happineſs and wiſhing them long Proſperity: So, the Joys of the *higheſt Heavens* (which are the Marriage Chamber of this divine Bridegroom our Saviour) in the Society of innumerable Saints and Angels and glorified Spirits, are prepar'd for thoſe that love our Lord Jeſus in Sincerity; and by a conſtant holy Life, are ready to leave theſe earthly Habitations, and enter with him into that holy Place: Where they ſhall enjoy a moſt bliſful Eternity, for ever ſinging Halleluja's to the Praiſe and Honour of that *glorious Name*, in which all the Nations of the World are bleſſed; *praiſing God and ſaying, Let us be glad and rejoyce and give Honour to him, for the Marriage of the Lamb is come, and his Wife hath made her ſelf ready; and bleſſed are they which are call'd to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.* And well is that Care and Watchfulneſs and holy *Preparation repay'd*, which Rev. 19. 7, 9.

will

will procure an Entrance into that holy Place, where Chriſt is ſitting at the right Hand of God; and make us Sharers in the Joys of Angels, and in the Happineſs of our dear Redeemer!

In the *laſt* place; by the *fooliſh* Virgins coming after the Door was *ſhut*, and ſaying, *Lord, Lord, open unto us*, and his anſwering, *I know you not*; is expreſs'd the ſad and *remidileſs* Condition of thoſe whom Death and Judgment ſurprize *unawares*, and that are not *prepar'd* by a *holy Life*. They may cry, *Lord, Lord*, long enough in the Bitterneſs and Anguiſh of their Souls, and profeſs that they believe in him and are his Diſciples, and call'd by his Name, *that they have eat and drunk in his Preſence, and that he hath taught in their Streets*, and the like: but yet, for all this, without a conſtant *perſevering Piety*, Chriſt will tell them *I know you not whence you are, depart from me all ye that work Iniquity*.

And, what inconceivable *Agonies* will thoſe excluded Wretches then be in! What *Horror* and *Deſpair* will then take Seiſure of their Souls! What *Outcries*, what hideous Wailings will there be! How will *ſome* frame fruitleſs *Excuſes*, *Lord, we have eaten and drank in thy Preſence, and thou haſt taught in our Streets*, &c. while *others*, with deep Sighs in vain beg *Pity* and Commiſeration, of him who never before *deny'd* it. What intolerable Anguiſh will they feel, to ſee thoſe whom they *hated* and *deſpis'd* on Earth,

Earth, then enter'd into the glorious Marriage Chamber of the Son of God; and *they themselves*, they who are prosperous here, and to all Appearance the Friends and Favourites of the divine Bridegroom, eternally *shut* out from his Presence and the Joys of those celestial Regions, and left behind in unconceivable *Torments*, and in the Company of malicious *Fiends* and Devils, to linger under an Eternity of Misery! No *Words* can ever reach those Horrors, nor can our Thoughts *conceive* them; and may none of us ever be so unhappy as to *feel* them! But be so *wise* as to watch and be ready, and have our Lamps burning, and our selves always prepar'd for this great coming of our Lord, *for we know not the Day nor the Hour.*

And thus have I given a particular, plain and practical Interpretation of this Parable of the *Ten Virgins*, whereof five were *wise* and five foolish; and shewn as I went along how aptly expressive it is of the Sense our Lord couch'd under it.

I proceed now to the other thing to be done, which is to urge that *Watchfulness* and *Preparation* by all manner of holy living against this coming of our Lord, which is necessary to our being admitted into his Joy; and to shew, how great the *Wisdom* of so doing is, and how great the *Folly* of the Contrary: For those that were *ready* and *trimm'd* their Lamps are call'd *wise* Virgins in the Parable; and those that were *not* ready, and their Lamps *out* are call'd *foolish*.

As

As for the *Folly* of not taking Care to be ready and prepar'd againſt that great Change of *Death* ſhall come; it is a thing juſtly to be wonder'd at, that Men who know that one Time or other they muſt ſurely *die*, and are wholly in the Dark as to the *preciſe Time* of their Death, and that they muſt die but once, and that, without any any further *Probation*, after Death comes *Judgment*; it is much to be wonder'd at that thoſe who know all this to be true, as Chriſtians are ſuppos'd to do, ſhould live ſo much at *random*, and be ſo fooliſhly careleſs in managing their *laſt Stake*, ſo heedleſs in doing that *well* which admits of no *Repetition*, and which, if done *ill* they are for ever *miſerable*. 'Tis the very Height of *Folly* this, and which, one would think, a Man of any Senſe could not be guilty of. There is nothing that Men are more *afraid* of than dying, and yet, ſo ſtrangely contradictious are they to themſelves, they make the *leaſt* Proviſion againſt this greateſt Evil. In *other* Matters Men are ſo *wiſe* as to endeavour to *ſecure* themſelves againſt their Fears; they provide againſt *Poverty* by *Diligence* and *Parſimony*, againſt *Pain* and *Diſeaſes* by proper *Antidotes* and Preſervatives, againſt the Approach of *Enemies* by the beſt *Defence* they are capable of making, and the like; and this many times when there is only a *Probability* of theſe Evils coming upon them: And yet againſt *Death*, though they *dread* it above *all things*, and know that it will *certainly*

certainly come and are uncertain how *soon*, they make *a little* Provision as if they were *immortal* as the Angels in Heaven, what a Bundle of fonds [illegible] They look upon Death [illegible] of Evils, and yet [illegible] they know [illegible] Preparation [illegible] they know the [illegible] unawares, and they [illegible] not be surpriz'd [illegible] and yet for all this [illegible] from [illegible] *remove* [illegible] were [illegible] they [illegible] ries [illegible] par'd [illegible] same Piece of [illegible] Man [illegible] therefore [illegible] cause [illegible] grow [illegible] hath [illegible] foolish [illegible] a Sinner [illegible] *Contradiction* [illegible] with [illegible] loves his [illegible] *this World* [illegible] *miserable* [illegible] Course of [illegible] with a *double* [illegible] and against all the [illegible] Reason.

As for the *Folly* of not taking Care to be ready and prepar'd againſt that great Change of *Death* ſhall come; it is a thing juſtly to be wonder'd at, that Men who know that one Time or other they muſt ſurely *die*, and are wholly in the Dark as to the *preciſe Time* of their Death, and that they muſt die but once, and that, without any any further *Probation*, after Death comes *Judgment*; it is much to be wonder'd at that thoſe who know all this to be true, as Chriſtians are ſuppos'd to do, ſhould live ſo much at *random*, and be ſo fooliſhly careleſs in managing their *laſt Stake*, ſo heedleſs in doing that *well* which admits of no *Repetition*, and which, if done *ill* they are for ever *miſerable*. 'Tis the very Height of *Folly* this, and which, one would think, a Man of any Senſe could not be guilty of. There is nothing that Men are more *afraid* of than dying, and yet, ſo ſtrangely contradictious are they to themſelves, they make the *leaſt* Proviſion againſt this greateſt Evil. In *other* Matters Men are ſo *wiſe* as to endeavour to *ſecure* themſelves againſt their Fears; they provide againſt *Poverty* by *Diligence* and *Parſimony*, againſt *Pain* and *Diſeaſes* by proper *Antidotes* and Preſervatives, againſt the Approach of *Enemies* by the beſt *Defence* they are capable of making, and the like; and this many times when there is only a *Probability* of theſe Evils coming upon them: And yet againſt *Death*, though they *dread* it above *all things*, and know that it will *certainly*

certainly come and are uncertain how *soon*, they make as *little* Provision as if they were *immortal* as the Angels in Heaven, what a Bundle of foolish Inconsistencies is here? They look upon Death as the *greatest* of Evils, and yet *regard* it the least of all things; they know it highly concerns 'em to make Preparation for it by a good Life, and they know the sad Consequence if it surprize 'em unawares, and they are not sure they shall not be surpriz'd the next Hour or Minute; and yet for all this they put the evil Day far from them, and by all Arts endeavour to *remove* such melancholy Thoughts as if they were resolv'd not to *avoid* but *suffer* what they fear, and *secure* to themselves the Miseries consequent upon an untimely and unprepar'd Death. And what is this, but just the same Piece of *Folly* and *Madness*, as for a Man because he greatly dreads the *Plague* therefore to run into an *infected House*, because he is afraid of *Poverty* therefore to grow *prodigal* and squander away what he hath? And what can be more strangely foolish and contradictious than this? Indeed, a Sinners *whole Life* is the greatest *Folly* and *Contradiction*, but 'tis most gross and *palpable* with Relation to *dying*; for, because a Man loves his *Body*, therefore *so* to *indulge* it in *this* World as to make it become eternally *miserable* in the *next*, and live in such a Course of sinful Pleasures as will be repaid with a *double* Death, is unaccountably foolish and against all the Dictates even of natural Reason.

I need not say more I think to expose the Folly of not making Preparation for so great a Change as Death will effect in every Man's Condition; or (in the Phrase of this Parable) of not keeping *Oyl in our Lamps*, nor watching against the divine Bridegroom's coming, but slumbering in a careless Inadvertency to those great things of Religion, *Death* and *Judgment*, till they overtake us as a *Thief in the Night*. And from what has been said of the *Folly* of *not* preparing for that Time of Terrors and greatest Concern to every Man, we may in a few Words collect the great *Wisdom* of being always in a *Readiness* to obey the Summons of our great Lord with *Chearfulness*.

For in short, to be *ready* and *prepar'd to die* when God shall please to call us, has all the *Wisdom* in it of making a constant due Provision against the greatest and most *concerning* Change that can befall us; and which we must *certainly* undergo, and how *soon* we know not, and that but *once* neither, and which will be follow'd by the final *Judgment* without any *new Opportunity* being afforded, wherein to *amend* the Errors of our then irrecoverably past Life: 'Tis to make *such* a Preparation for this great Change as may render it *advantageous* to us whenever it shall come, than which no greater Piece of Wisdom can be imagin'd: For that certainly is the greatest Wisdom that makes a Man *wise to Salvation*.

Wherefore,

Wherefore, to conclude this Parable. Since *it is appointed to Men once to dye, and after that the Judgment*; or, in the Stile of this Parable, since Jesus the divine Bridegroom will one time come to summon every particular Member of the Christian Church, his mystical Spouse, to leave *this* World and attend him in the World of *Spirits*, there to partake with him (if ready and adorn'd with the Wedding Garment, and their Lamps burning with the Oyl of Righteousness) of the everlasting Felicities of this heavenly Kingdom; or else, if not prepar'd to appear before him *then*, to be for ever *excluded* his Presence, and thrust into the dire Abodes of the Devil and his Angels: Since this is so, let us all make it our sincere Endeavour, by a serious and hearty Observation of those holy Rules of living which our Lord has mark'd out to us as the Way to Immortality and a Preparation for his Appearance, to be always ready to go out and meet him; that we may enter with him into the Marriage Chamber before the Door be shut, and not hear that dismal Sound, *I know ye not, depart from me ye Workers of Iniquity.*

And because this great Coming of the Bridegroom will be but *once*, for 'tis appointed to Men but *once* to dye, and after that but *one final Judgment*; let us by no means trifle away this *only* Opportunity of working out our Salvation in Folly and Impertinency, much less in *Wickedness* and

Vice; but often reflect upon the Agonies we ſhall feel when we ſhall find this *one only* Life which we have ſo wretchedly miſpent, drawing to a *Concluſion*, and no Hopes of any further Opportunity to *recover* our ſelves in, but juſt as we *then* are in that deplorable *unprepar'd* Condition, be hurried away to give Account of our Works. Lord! What Confuſion muſt ſuch wretches feel, what horrid Tortures muſt needs pierce their Souls, to ſee Hell gaping to receive 'em, and no Poſſibility of *Eſcape* or ſo much as a *Reprieve*, but plunge they muſt into thoſe *Lakes of Fire and Brimſtone*, which yet they might have *avoided* if they would?

If this be a Caſe *infinitely deplorable* (and if this be *not*, certainly nothing is) then it nearly concerns us all while we have Time, that is, while this *one only* Life does laſt, to make Proviſion for a *happy Departure* out of it, by a more holy and circumſpect Converſation in it. And becauſe the Time *when* this one only Life ſhall end is wholly in the *Dark* to us, and *we know not the Day nor the Hour when our Lord will come*; let this awaken us into ſerious Thoughts and Reſolutions of making the beſt Uſe of the remaining Portion of our Lives, and break off immediately our ſinful Courſe of living, leſt the Opportunity for ſo doing be gone before we think of it, and we be *ſurpriz'd* into endleſs Miſery e're we are *aware*. Let us always keep our *Lamps burning*, our Souls employ'd in holy Meditations, and our

our ſelves in a Readineſs by a good Life; and then, though it is *appointed for us all to die*, and that but *once*, and *after that the Judgment*, and *we know not the Day nor the Hour* when the Summons ſhall be given: We may with *Comfort* wait for our dear Lord's appearing, and ſay, *Come Lord Jeſus, come quickly.*

The PRAYER.

I.

O Glorious Jeſus! The Saviour and the Judg of Mankind, before whoſe juſt Tribunal we muſt all certainly appear, but when we, know not, and there give Account of our Works, and be rewarded according to them; aſſiſt me, I beſeech thee, with thy Grace, that I may make it my chief Care with Cheerfulneſs and Comfort to obey thy Summons to this great Audit whenever thou ſhalt call. And to that End, grant I may be frequent in the Contemplation of my Mortality; how ſhort and frail my Life is here, how inevitably and cloſely Judgment follows Death, and how certainly the one will find me as the other leaves me. Thou holy Jeſus, though a ſtern Judg to obſtinate Rebels to thy Father, art yet the Bridegroom of thy Spouſe the Church, and infinite is thy Love to thoſe that preſerve inviolate their Fidelity to thee; and happy will they be beyond Expreſſion, who

at thy glorious coming to receive thy Bride into thy Kingdom, ſhall be admitted into thy Marriage Chamber, and be for ever where thou art, and behold and partake of thy Glory. O may I therefore, like a wiſe Virgin, preſerve my Innocence untouch'd, be cloath'd with Humility, and adorn'd with a meek and quiet Spirit, and ſober and temperate in all things, having my Lamp full of Oyl, my Soul repleniſh'd with Vertue, and conſtantly burning with the Fires of Piety and Devotion; that ſo when the Cry ſhall be made, Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him; I may be ready to obey thy Call, though it be made at Midnight, and be found of thee our deareſt Lord, as a Virgin in Peace, without Spot and blameleſs.

II.

I muſt confeſs with Shame and Sorrow, O merciful Jeſus, that I am too prone to ſlumber and ſleep, and forget to advert as I ought, to this thy glorious Second Advent, and the Forerunner of it, Death; and am apt fooliſhly to put that Day far from me, and to think thou delayeſt thy coming; whereby my Oyl is waſted, and my Lamp almoſt gone out.

O do thou therefore quicken me in thy Righteouſneſs, bleſſed Redeemer, and grant that the Conſideration of the ſurprizing Suddainneſs of thy Appearance upon the Throne of Judgment, and the great Uncertainty of the Time when I ſhall be call'd from hence

and bound over to that great Aſſize, there to give Account of my Works and how I liv'd and how I dy'd: Grant that this Conſideration may put an End to my ſpiritual Drouzineſs, and engage me in Prayer and Watchfulneſs, and pious ſober Converſation, becauſe I know not the Day nor the Hour. And when by the Decays of Age or Violence of Diſeaſes my Departure into the World of Spirits ſeems to be near approaching: O then enable me with thy prevailing Grace, to trim my Lamp with an extraordinary Diligence, to enliven my Religion, and not be to ſeek for Oyl, then when my Lamp ſhould be beſt repleniſh'd with it, and burn moſt vigorouſly. O let me never truſt to the great Uncertainty of a Death-Bed Repentance, nor vainly depend upon the redundant Merit of others except that of my Saviour which is my only Hope, but now in Time of Health provide for a happy Death, leſt my Lamp being out when thou ſhalt call me to attend thee, Amazement and Horror ſeize me, and the Door be ſhut upon me. And well will my wakeful Preparation be rewarded, deareſt Jeſus, when I ſhall be admitted into thy glorious Preſence, and enjoy the endleſs Bliſſes of thy heavenly Bride-Chamber. O therefore grant me thy Grace not to ſleep as do others, but to watch and be ſober, and ſo much the more as I ſee that Day approaching. *Amen.* Bleſſed Saviour, *Amen*, *Amen*.

Parable VII.

Of the good Samaritan.

Luke x. 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35.

A certain Man went down from Jerusalem *to* Jericho, *and fell among Thieves, which stripped him of his Rayment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.*

And by chance there came down a certain Priest that Way, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other Side.

And likewise a Levite, when he was at the Place, came and look'd on him, and passed by on the other Side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journyed, came where he was: And when he saw him he had Compassion on him,

And went to him, and bound up his Wounds, pouring in Oyl and Wine, and set him on his own Beast, and brought

brought him to an Inn, and took Care of him.

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out Two Pence, and gave them to the Hoſt, and ſaid unto him, take care of him, and whatſoever thou ſpendeſt more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

THIS Parable was ſpoken upon occaſion of a Lawyer's asking our Lord, What he ſhould do to inherit eternal Life? Who, upon Chriſt's referring him to his own Law, and his Repetition of the two great Commandments of *loving God with all our Hearts, and our Neighbours as our ſelves*, and Chriſt's returning to him, *this do and thou ſhalt live*; being *willing to juſtifie himſelf*, as an Obſerver of all this, ask'd this further Queſtion, and who is my Neighbour? That ſo knowing our Saviour's Senſe in that Particular, he might the better make it appear to him, that he not only *lov'd God with all his Heart*, which he thought he could ſafely affirm, but likewiſe *his Neighbour as himſelf*; and therefore ſtood fair for *eternal Life*. To this latter Queſtion Jeſus anſwer'd by the Parable above recited, and then ask'd the conceited Lawyer, *Which now of theſe Three thinkeſt thou was Neighbour to him that fell among the Thieves*, the *Prieſt* and *Levite* that were his Country-Men, Children of the ſame *Abraham*,

ham, who yet took no charitable Notice of him, but *paſſed by on the other Side*; or the *Samaritan*, who though a ſchiſmatical Stranger to the Common Wealth of *Iſrael*, and an Enemy to every *Jew*, yet had Compaſſion on him and reliev'd and ſuccour'd him with Charity ſuitable to his Diſtreſs? To this the Lawyer anſwer'd as he could not chooſe but do, *he* was his Neighbour that *ſhew'd Mercy on him*. Then ſaid Jeſus immediately to him, *Go and do thou likewiſe*. Which Words ſtruck home upon his Conſcience, that they put a Stop to his intended *Juſtification* of himſelf, and we hear of no further Intercourſe he had with our Lord; and may imagine how he ſneak'd away aſham'd and confounded.

The Deſign therefore of this Parable is to give us a true Notion of *Charity*, or Compaſſion and Relief of ſuch as are in Diſtreſs; and that both with Reſpect to the *Object* of it, and the *Manner* and *Meaſure* of *expreſſing* it to ſuch Object. And therefore in diſcourſing upon this Parable I ſhall do three things.

Firſt, I ſhall ſhew who are the proper *Objects* of this Sort of Charity, according to the true Senſe and Meaning of our holy Religion.

Secondly, How we are obliged to *relieve* them, in what *Manner* and in what *Meaſure*.

Thirdly, What great *Encouragement* we have to this excellent Duty, with reſpect both

both to *this* World, and that *above*; or what a Bleſſedneſs it is to be able thus to *give* rather than *receive*.

Firſt, As for the proper *Objects* of this Charity, they are in general the *really* Indigent and Calamitous, and ſuch as are unable to help *themſelves*. And that (without *excepting* any) whether they be Strangers and Foreigners, or Enemies, or Heathens, or Hereticks, or wicked Perſons: *All* that are *indeed* neceſſitous and helpleſs, are made by our holy and moſt merciful Religion the Objects of our Compaſſion and Relief. Thus the Apoſtle, *As we have Opportunity, let us do good unto all Men*, Gal. 6.10. and our Lord, *Do good to them that hate you*, Mat. 5.44. and Rom. 12. 20. *If thy Enemy hunger feed him, if he thirſt give him Drink*; and in this Parable our Lord propoſes to our Imitation the Example of a *Samaritan* taking great Care of an unfortunate *Jew*, though there could be no greater *Enmity* than between the *Jews* and the *Samaritans*, and that grounded upon what of all things makes Ill Will the moſt inveterate, *Diverſity of Opinion in Religion*. And indeed, 'twould be a barbarous Piece of Cruelty and Inhumanity, if I ſhould let a Man *periſh*, without any Commiſeration or Help from me when I am able to give it him, becauſe he has formerly, it may be, been unkind or injurious to me, or is of a different Religion, and of a Nation that is in Hoſtility with that to which I belong.

This

This certainly is not doing as I would be done to, nor loving my Neighbour as my ſelf, for every Man in a religious Senſe is my Neighbour; 'tis more like the Rage of a *Tiger* than the Bowels of a Man, or the *Malice* of a *Devil* than the *Charity* of a *Chriſtian*. As for Charity to Strangers and Foreigners, that is expreſly commanded in ſeveral Places of Scripture, particularly 1 *Pet.* 4. 9. where what we tranſlate *uſe Hoſpitality one to another*, is in the Original, φιλόξενοι εἰς ἀλλήλους, *Be kind to Strangers*; and by the Author to
Heb. 13. 2. the *Hebrews*, the Probability of receiving *Angels* unawares in that Diſguiſe (as *Abraham* and *Lot* did, *Gen.* 18. 3. and 19. 2.) is made the Motive to it. And how excellent a Piece of Charity this is, and how conducive to the Prevention of much Sin and Miſery, I need not ſpend much Time to prove: There are few that have liv'd any conſiderable Time in the World, and have ſeen more Parts of it than one, but have ſome Time or other, either taſted the *Comfort* of an *hoſpitable* Diſpoſition or *ſmarted* for the *Want* of it; and ſuch Men are the fitteſt to tell their Thoughts of either: That is, how inhumane 'tis to be without Bowels to an indigent Stranger, and how happy Mankind would be in every Place, were the Orders of the great Governour of the World duly obſerv'd in this Matter. And as for *wicked* Perſons, who *deſerve* the leaſt Compaſſion of any, if they are in other Reſpects real Objects of Charity, their Wickedneſs

edneſs muſt not put a Bar to it; for we are to imitate the Example of the merciful God, who is *kind and Beneficent to the unthankful and to the evil.*

But all this is to be underſtood with Reſpect only to the *really* neceſſitous and helpleſs, whoſe Wants and Calamities are not feign'd; and who are unable to help *themſelves* to better Circumſtances.

For there are a very vile Sort of People, who make a Trade of going about from Houſe to Houſe and with doleful Accents, and a forlorn Appearance and formal Complaints endeavour to melt People into Compaſſion towards them; who yet are far from being Objects of this Sort of Charity; their Neceſſities being *counterfeit*, or at leaſt they being very well able to ſupply them by their own Labour if they would: 'Tis well known how gainful they make this lazy Courſe of Life, how unwilling they are to *work* when any would employ them; how much abominable Debauchery there is in thoſe vagrant Societies, and how great a Peſt they are to the Publick; they being no better than a Band of Villains and Robbers, and unprofitable idle Drones, that live upon the Labour and Spoil of others, and are no Way uſeful or ſerviceable themſelves: And therefore to *relieve* their pretended Neceſſities, is to encourage the worſt Men living in a Courſe of Life highly diſhonourable to God, injurious to the State, and ruinous to their own Souls. Nay further, 'tis to deprive

deprive those that *indeed* deserve our Charity of considerable Supplies, which are, though *insensibly* bestow'd upon those vile Wretches; and were it computed what some charitable Persons give in a Year in Mony to common Beggars at their Doors or otherwise, 'twould amount to a Sum big enough to cheer the Hearts of many *Fatherless* and Widows, and decay'd Housekeepers that are in greater *Want* than those Vagrants, though not so whining and so affectedly nasty and ragged. And 'twould be worth while for a Person that has us'd hitherto to scatter his Charity among those *counterfeit* Objects of it, to try the Experiment what such Gifts would amount to in a Twelve Month's Time, by laying *aside* what he would otherwise have bestow'd that Way, whenever he is importun'd by such Wretches for an Alms; and then see whether he can't dispose of it to better Purpose.

Indeed, *Labour* and *Correction* is the best Sort of Charity to such Kind of Beggars. And would Men in Authority resolve to do their Duty in this Matter, and other Persons resolve to send such Vagabonds away empty, and with Reproof and Shame, the Case would soon be altered, and they would find it better to work than starve, and look upon honest Industry more eligible than the Lash. Much Wickedness would by this Means be prevented, and it would be a double and treble Charity; 'twould provide for the Happiness of both Body and Soul of such

ſuch as ſhould be reformed by it from ſuch a helliſh Courſe of Life; 'twould be a great Benefit to the Publick, and Men would find themſelves more able to ſupport ſuch as are *really* oppreſs'd with Want, and utterly unable to help *themſelves*. And ſuch Behaviours as this to ſturdy Vagrants, however harſh and ſevere it may ſeem to ſome indiſcreetly compaſſionate Perſons, is plainly commanded by the great Apoſtle, 2 *Theſ.* 3. 10. *He that will not work, neither let him eat.* He that *Will* not work, that is, that appears to be able to labour but rather chuſes an idle wandring Life; and there is not One in Twenty of our common Beggars, but are of this Sort, hail and luſty and ſtrong, and in more Heart and better fed than many honeſt and *induſtrious* People: And they that can travel as they do around the Kingdom, we can't ſuppoſe, whatever they may pretend, to be incapable of Labour.

Indeed, ſometimes a *real* Object of Charity may preſent it ſelf at ones Door or Abroad, ſuch as the blind and aged and maimed, and the like, and theſe, no Queſtion, ought to be *reliev'd*; but there being ſo many *Counterfeits*, and the ill Conſequence of miſplacing ones charity upon them being ſo very great; He is very *indiſcreet* in beſtowing his Alms that will not be firſt very well ſatisfied whether they are what they *pretend* to be, and deſerve his Charity or no.

But this Severity muſt be uſed with *Prudence*, and he that does deſerve *Correction* as

a Vagrant, may yet by some calamitous Accident in following his lew'd Trade, be at present in urgent Necessity of *Relief*; and here the Way is, first to supply the *Necessity*, and afterwards in due Time to superadd the *Correction*. For I must let no Man, how wicked soever, perish if I can prevent it; and as I am in Charity bound, by *Severity* when the Man is able to bear it, to provide for the Safety of his *Soul*, so by a timely Relief likewise when there is *urgent* Need of it to support his *Body*.

So that upon the Whole, all that want are to be releiv'd, but 'tis after a different Manner, and the Charity must be adapted to the Necessity; to the Widow and the Fatherless, the Naked, the Hungry, the Sick and the Helpless must be ministred Comfort and Support; but to sturdy lazy Travellers (as they call themselves) the *Lash* and *Labour* and *rough* Treatment; and this, however harshly it may sound, is the greater Charity of the Two.

And thus much in *general* for the first Enquiry occasion'd by this Parable, *viz.* who are the proper Objects of this Kind of Charity, according to the Intent of our holy Religion, or in the Words of the Lawyer to our Saviour, *who is our Neighbour* in this Respect? I proceed to the

Second Enquiry, *How* we are oblig'd to *express* this Charity to the proper Objects of it, in what *Manner* and in what *Measure*? And in *general*, as to the *Manner* of relieving

ing, it muſt be adapted to the *Neceſſity* to be relieved; and as to the *Meaſure*, it muſt likewiſe be ſuitable to the *Degree* of the *Neceſſity*, and to the *Ability* of the Perſon that relieves it. But, to do Juſtice to this Enquiry, we muſt be more *particular*, and ſhall therefore reduce the Neceſſities of the Objects of our Charity to theſe three Heads; *Poverty*, *Sickneſs*, and *Loſs of Liberty*, and ſhew the *Manner* and *Meaſure* of relieving each.

As for *Poverty*, it may be of ſeveral Kinds, and may conſiſt either in Want of Meat and Drink, or of Cloaths, or of a Habitation, or in a forlorn Widow-hood, and Loſs of Parents; *i. e.* in ſuch an urgent Want of Neceſſaries for Life as the Perſons are utterly unable, at leaſt for the preſent, to ſupply themſelves withal, and ſuch a Loſs of Husband or Parent, as leaves deſtitute of ſuch Neceſſaries, and of Means to procure them.

Now in caſe of ſuch Poverty, the Relief muſt be ſuited to the *moſt urgent* Neceſſity; he that is hungry muſt be ſupplied with Meat, and the thirſty with Drink, the naked with Cloathing ſufficient to keep out the Injuries of the Weather, Strangers and diſtreſs'd Travellers with Lodging, and Widows, and ſuch as have been Houſe-keepers but are fall'n to Decay, with convenient Habitations, and a competent Subſiſtence; and the Fatherleſs with good Education, and a Paternal Care in diſpoſing of them to

Trades and Employments, whereby they ſhall be enabled to provide for themſelves. And if any ſhould be ſo deſtitute of all Comfort as to want moſt or all of theſe Neceſſaries, they muſt be ſupply'd with all, beginning with that of which there is the moſt *need*; or elſe with a competent Piece of *Mo-*
Eccleſ. 10. 19. *ny*, which, as the wiſe Man ſays, *anſwers all things*. But this *laſt* muſt be underſtood only with reſpect to a poor Man that is in ſuch Circumſtances, as that, he can, without any great Inconvenience, ſhift for himſelf; and with the Mony given him provide what is neceſſary: But when a Man is in ſuch preſent urgent neceſſity, whether of Food, or Drink, or Rayment, or Lodging, or the like; that he will be in great Danger of periſhing, if his Wants be not *quickly* ſupply'd, and the Diſtance from publick Places of Entertainment great, and the Seaſon extreme; in theſe and the like Circumſtances, 'twould be but a mock piece of Charity to give Mony and take no farther Care of him; there muſt be *particular* Proviſion made for ſuch a Man's *particular* Wants, and that *immediately* and without Delays. Thus for Inſtance, ſuppoſe a poor Man ſhould come to any one's Houſe in a ſharp Winter, and dark Night approaching, cold and faint, and hungry and weary, and beg for Admittance, and that Pity might be had of his ſad Condition, and ſome Releif afforded him; and ſuppoſe the Maſter of the Houſe ſhould refuſe to take him in, or let him

him refresh himself with him, but withal give him a Piece of Mony, and tell him that two or three Miles off there is a Town, where for that Mony he may have Supply of his Wants, and so send him away; and suppose this poor Wretch should either faint by the Way or miss of it, and in the weak Condition he is in, be forced to lie abroad, and by the Morning be found quite overcome by the rigorous Season, and starv'd to Death: In this Case what will the Man's *dry* Charity avail him? Or rather, shall he not answer for the Death of that distress'd Creature, when he could have prevented it but would not?

The Manner of the good Samaritan's relieving and succouring the unfortunate Jew in the Parable, though by his different Way of Religion, quite estrang'd from the Jews, is a remarkable Example of a *thorough* Charity. When he came near and saw what a sad Condition the Thieves had left the poor Man in, despoil'd of his Mony and his Cloaths, and wounded and left half-dead; he first applies himself to the Relief of the greatest Necessity, and binds up his Wounds, pouring in Oyl and Wine. And then, not thinking *that* a sufficient Charity to a Man in his Condition, he set him on his own Beast, and brought him to an Inn, and took farther Care of his Refreshment, and stay'd there with him till the morrow to see that he had what was convenient for him; and because his perfect Recovery would be a

thing of Time, he leaves Mony with the Host, and a Charge to look well after him, and promises that whatever was spent more upon that poor Man's Account, when he came again he would repay. This was indeed a *compleat* Relief, and manag'd with as much *Discretion* as *Compassion*, and our Lord's Application is, *Go and do thou likewise.* In all Cases of this Nature, the Circumstances of the poor must be consider'd, and the Relief suited accordingly.

2. As to the Manner of expressing our Charity to the *sick*, 'tis in short to make frequent Visits of Comfort to them, to refresh their *Spirits* by Pious Discourses of the Power and Goodness and Wisdom of that God who sends the Affliction, who can *remove* it if he thinks fit, and whose *chastning* is an Argument of his *Love*; and that if he still *continues* it, his Wisdom sees it will be for the *best at last*; that so they may be inclin'd to hope and trust in God, and patiently submit to his good Pleasure: And 'tis to supply likewise what is necessary for their Attendance and Recovery. The poorer sort should express their Charity in this Instance by *personal* Attendance and Service; and the more wealthy by providing things necessary, and overlooking and directing to what is convenient. And this is a most noble Piece of Charity, and provides for the Health of the *Soul* as well as the Body, and nothing can be more seasonable and *well-tim'd*. For in Time of Sickness the *whole*

Man

Man is dejected, and the Spirit which ſhould bear up his Infirmity, is then it *ſelf*, for the moſt part, *wounded*; through the near Proſpect of the other World and the bold Accuſations of Conſcience, which *then*, unleſs quite ſear'd is loud and clamorous. Then the Man is leaſt of all able to help *himſelf*, and the Charge of Sickneſs is great, and he that was poor in *Health*, when *ſick* is doubly poor; and indeed there is no greater Object of Pity and Compaſſion than a poor ſick Man. And as *all* Charity muſt be univerſal without excepting even *Enemies*; ſo in *this* caſe, our Enemies ſhould be the Objects of our Charity to *chooſe*. For upon a ſick-Bed 'tis moſt likely that they *will* be reconcil'd, and 'tis highly neceſſary than then they *ſhould* be; for Sickneſs often ends in Death, and no Man can tell but *that* Sickneſs which his Enemy then lies under may be his *laſt*: And 'tis a miſerable thing to die in *Enmity*. And therefore, before it be too late, whoever is at variance with a ſick Man ſhould go to him and endeavour a Reconcilement; if he hath injur'd the *ſick* in any reſpect he ſhould ask his Pardon, and make him Satisfaction and Reſtitution; and if the ſick Man has injur'd *him*, he ſhould go to him to let him know that he freely forgives him, and deſires that all Ill-Will may be at at End for the future. And at that Time, when the Spirit is uſually more ſoftned and compliant than in Health, and the Soul more awaken'd and ſenſible of her Duty, 'tis very probable he

will hearken, and the Man will gain his Brother. And 'tis a great Charity indeed to ease a sick Man's Mind of the deviliſh and tormenting Paſſions of Malice and Revenge; it provides for Peace and Amity for the future ſhould he *recover*, and ſhould he *dye*, it makes his Account much eaſier at the Day of Judgment.

3. As for Charity to ſuch as are depriv'd of their *Liberty*, the *Manner* of it conſiſts in viſiting and diſcourſing comfortably to them, and in endeavouring by the beſt Methods we can to procure their Enlargement; and in the mean time, in helping them to Neceſſaries, and perſwading their Keepers to be kind to them, and uſe them tenderly. And if they are impriſon'd for *Crimes*, 'tis to endeavour to make them ſenſible of the Guilt of them before *God*, and that unleſs they ſincerely repent of them, an eternal Bondage in Chains of Darkneſs, and in the loweſt Hell, ſhall come in the Place of the Dungeon, their Iron Shackles, and temporary Confinement. And the Objects of this Piece of Charity are as before *all*, Enemies as well as Friends, Strangers and Foreigners, as well as Neighbours and Acquaintance.

Under this Head of the *Manner* of expreſſing our Charity to the Neceſſitous, it is proper to enquire what *Preference* may be made of one Object of Charity before another, if more ſhould offer themſelves than one Man can relieve, at leaſt at the *ſame* time?

time? For our Direction in this matter, St. *Paul* has left us two general Rules, the one, *Gal.* 6. 10. where he says, *as we have Opportunity let us do good unto all Men; but especially to those that are of the Houshold of Faith*, in which we are taught to prefer *Christians* before *Heathens* and *Infidels*, when there is no Help but *one* must be preferr'd; and among Christians, to prefer in like Circumstances the pious and sincerely good, before such as live not agreeably to their holy Profession, for such only as have the *Power* of Godliness, are properly of the Houshold of Faith. The other Rule is in 1 *Tim.* 5. 8. in these Words, *If any provide not for his own, especially those of his own House*, or Kindred, *he has denyed the Faith*, &c. and here we are directed, if a Preference *must* be made, to make it in Favour of our *Friends* and *Relatives* before such as are *Strangers* to us.

But these Rules must be thus explained. As *first*, where 'tis *impossible* for us to comply with *all* Opportunities of doing good, there this Preference is to be made; but when we *can* we must do good to *all*. And *secondly*, When the Necessities of *pious* Christians, and our *Friends* and *Relations* are *equally great* and *urgent with* those of the impious and Strangers to us, there likewise our Charity should begin at *Home*: But thirdly, when the Distress of an *Ill* Man or a *Stranger* is *greater* and *more urgent* than that of a *good* Man or my Friend and Relative, so

that the *former* will be in danger of perishing unless *immediately* reliev'd, and the *latter* will *not*, but may safely tarry longer: Then there must be no Respect of Persons, but the *greatest* Necessity, where-ever it be found, must be *first* reliev'd.

I shall add but one thing more relating to the *Manner* of expressing our Charity, and that is what St. *Peter* advises, 1 *Pet.* 4. 9. that it be done without *grudging*. The Word in the Original is γόγγυσμος, which signifies *murmuring*, or an *unwillingness* in doing any thing, as if 'twere torn and *forc'd* from one, rather than proceeded from a *free Inclination*. And this hateful churlish way of Alms-giving, St. *Paul* likewise expressly forbids, and says, our Charity must
2 Cor. 9. 7. not be shewn *grudgingly, or as of Necessity*, and *Rom.* 12. 8. *He that sheweth Mercy, let him do it with Chearfulness*; according to the Example which God himself hath set us,
Jam. 1. 5. *Who giveth to every Man liberally, and upbraideth not.*

And here, I can't but admire and adore the infinite Goodness of God; who has not only oblig'd us to the *Substance* of this Duty, but has so order'd the very *Circumstantials* of it; that the necessitous may be reliev'd with as much *Decency* and *Ease* to themselves as can be, and the Alms of others look rather like their own *Propriety*, as the Payment of a Debt, or restoring of a Pledge, or bestowing a Reward; and that their *Souls* might not be griev'd by Frowns and

Taunts

Taunts, and unkind Language, when they receive Supply for the Needs of their *Body!* For Man as well as God loves a *chearful* Giver; and a Benefit that comes *hardly*, and with Shews of *Unwillingneſs*, is much *leſſened* in its Value; and a Man of a generous Spirit would prefer a *Mite* given with a *free* Heart and Words of *Kindneſs*, before the *Largeſs* of an *Emperour*, if he muſt ſuffer *Upbraidings* for it, and *opprobrious* Treatment. *Super Omnia, Vultus acceſſêre Boni*, ſays *Horace*: All the Delicates at his Friends Entertainment would have reliſh'd but very indifferently, had not a *chearful Countenance* aſſur'd him of his *Welcome*. And if a *free* Charity be given in *ſecret* too, as our Lord himſelf directs, the poor Man will not be ſo much as put to the *Bluſh* for what he receives; and will come ſhort of the rich in nothing that is *neceſſary*, and be free from the *Vexations* that attend an opulent Condition; and the Advantage of the Wealthy over the Poor would then conſiſt chiefly in *this*, That they are by God's Providence enabled to be the *Supporters of the weak*; it being according to the Words of the *Lord Jeſus*, *more bleſſed to give than to receive*: Eſpecially if we in the Mat. 6. 4. Acts 20. 35.

Next Place, conſider the *Meaſure* of this Charity. And in general, it muſt be equal to the *Neceſſities* of the Poor, or at leaſt agreeable to every Man's *Ability*. A *great* Neceſſity muſt have a *great* Supply; as ſuppoſe a whole *Family* be in want, the Relief ought

ought to be greater than to a *single* Person: If a *Forreigner* is distress'd and has not wherewithal to carry him to his own Country, *he* should be more plentifully reliev'd than a Traveller that is in his Native Country and has comparatively but a little Way to go. He that is a Prisoner or Captive for a *great* Debt or Ransom, should receive more liberally of our Charity than one that may be releas'd for *less*; the Necessities of a poor Man that is *sick* being doubly great, the Relief that is given him should bear Proportion, and be more liberal than ordinary: And the more dangerous and lasting, and consequently *chargeable* the Sickness is, the Charity should rise the higher still, and greater Care be had of him, and Visits oftner made to him. He that is *utterly* helpless and uncapable of working, ought to receive more largely of our Charity than one that is in some Measure able to help and provide for himself. In these and all other Cases of this Nature, he that has the greatest need must have the greatest *Supply*; and he that has the greatest *Ability*, his Charity must be answerable, and he must give *most*. But to prevent all unnecessary Scruples in this Matter, we should remember, that Charity does not consist in an *Indivisible* Point, *less* than which shall not be accepted; for a *Mite* given with a free Heart and good Intention by a poor Widow that could afford no more, was not only *accepted*, but the Charity highly *commended* by our Lord himself, and no doubt

doubt but was crown'd with a great Reward. The general Rule in this Case is that of the Apostle, 1 *Pet.* 4. 11. *As every Man has receiv'd the Gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good Stewards of the manifold Grace of God.* That is, every Man's Charity must be proportionable to his Ability; he that has much must give plenteously, and he that has little must chearfully give of that little; and no Man that has any Share in this World's Good, must wholly shut up his Bowels of Compassion from his Brother that hath need. Remembring, *That he that soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly, and he that soweth plenteously shall reap also plenteously.* So that according to the Order of our good Creator, we see Riches are like our Blood, to *circulate*, and ought to be convey'd in due Proportions to every Part of the great Body of Mankind: The greater Channels are to supply the lesser, and the *fuller* they are the more they must *communicate*: And none must presume upon Pain of the worst of ill Consequences to *stop* this Course, or divert it to unprofitable Uses. 2 Cor. 9. 6.

When our *own* Needs and those of our *Relatives*, are modestly and *reasonably* satisfied and provided for, all the rest God gives us to bestow upon the poor and needy, 'tis their Inheritance; and we shall be unjust in our Stewardship if we with-hold it from them. And, in the Words of the excellent Bishop *Taylor*, *Certainly there is not any greater Baseness, than to suffer a Man to perish*

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or be in extreme want of that, *which God gave me* for *him, and beyond my own Needs.* And it must ever be remembred, That as Men's *Estates* increase, their *Charity* must in due Proportion increase likewise; it must not lie an useless Lump in a Chest, or be improv'd only to increase the Hoard, or minister to Luxury and Excess, or the Extravagancies of a prodigal Heir; but this Blessing of God must be distributed according to the Will of God, to sweeten and alleviate the Miseries of Man.

And now, would Men but act according to this their Duty, what abundant Supply would there be for the Necessities of every one? That of *Isaiah* 49. 9, 10. would then be *literally* fulfill'd, *Say to the Prisoners, Go forth, to them that are in Darkness, shew your selves; they shall feed in the Ways, their Pastures shall be in all high Places. They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the Heat nor Sun smite them; for he that hath Mercy on them shall lead them, even by the Springs of Waters shall he guide them.* How many bitter Complaints, how many Sighs and Tears, how much Misery, and how much Sin would by such Charity be prevented? How many more might most Men relieve than they do? How very many might a Man of a large Estate take care of, and what vast Numbers of poor might have a very comfortable Subsistence, if *all* such Men would conscientiously perform their Duty in this Matter? And with what *Ease* might this be done

done too? That which is every Day ſquander'd away to no Purpoſe, or conſum'd in Vice and Vanity, could it be computed, would amount to a prodigious Sum; and were but *ſo* much beſtow'd in *Charity* by every rich Man, as heedleſly and unaccountably ſlips from him, how many would enjoy a comfortable Maintenance, who now want Neceſſaries, and are ready to be ſtarv'd, and all the while the rich Man be not diſcernably the poorer for it? And if ſo *little* when rightly diſpos'd of would go ſo far in this bleſſed Work, what happy Effects ſhould we ſoon ſee, if Men of large Poſſeſſions would be perſwaded to obey their great Benefactor, and give *largely* of their Abundance! And in order to this they would do well to remember, that Riches are not properly and intirely Men's *own*, but *Talents* committed to them by God to improve, and lay out to his Glory. That 'tis he that is the great *Lord* and *Proprietor* of all, and *Men*, how opulent ſoever, no other than his *Stewards*; inrich'd on purpoſe that they may ſupply thoſe that have need, and take care that none in this great Family of the World periſh for want of what is needful for their Support: And that, of the *Diſcharge* of this their Steward-ſhip, they muſt render an Account at the Day of Judgment, the general Audit of all Mankind; and then, the faithful and good Stewards, that have fulfill'd their Lord's Command, and gave the poor of this great Family, *their Portion of Meat in due Sea-*

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ſon, ſhall be receiv'd into their Maſter's Joy: But the *unfaithful* and wicked Stewards, that were cruel and *hard-hearted* to their fellow-Servants, and only feaſted and pamper'd *themſelves*, grew exceſſive and luxurious with their Lord's Allowance, and *did eat and drink with the Drunken*; their Lord will
Luk. 12. 42. *come in a Day when they look not for him*, and *cut them aſunder, and appoint them their Portion with Unbelievers, where ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of Teeth.*

And thus much may ſuffice to be ſpoken to the ſecond Enquiry, *How* we are to *expreſs* our Charity to the proper Objects of it, in what *Manner*, and in what *Meaſure*?

But before I proceed to what remains to be done according to the propos'd Method, I think it will not be amiſs to enquire whether in the Expreſſes of our Charity to the *ſick*, Danger of *infection* will not excuſe from viſiting them?

To this I anſwer, *firſt* in *general*, that Danger of Infection will not excuſe *all* from viſiting the ſick: For 'twould be ſtrangely *inhumane*, and contrary to this Chriſtian Pity and Compaſſion which we are now diſcourſing of, to deſert a poor helpleſs Creature in his *greateſt Neceſſity*, only becauſe there is a Probability of falling into the like Calamity: And would any Man be willing to be ſerv'd ſo himſelf? *Some* then ought, even in Caſe of *Contagion*, to viſit and attend the ſick; but *who* are they, for every one will be ready to ſhift it from himſelf?

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In the *firſt* place, I think the neareſt *Relations* of the Party ought to do it, for they have a *double* Tye upon them, that of *Nature* as well as of Religion; and among theſe Relations, thoſe that are the moſt diſengag'd from *Buſineſs* and the Affairs of this World, and have therefore the leaſt Obligation to come into other Company where there may be Danger of ſpreading the Infection further; and likewiſe ſuch as have the feweſt *Dependents* upon them: That is, *Private* and *ſingle* Perſons are oblig'd to this Duty before thoſe that are of more publick Callings, and have Families; and among theſe, he that is *moſt* free and diſengag'd, and capable withal, is the *moſt* oblig'd. If there be no *Relations* of the infected Perſon (whether he be Poor or Rich, Friend or Enemy, Good or Bad, the Caſe is the ſame) or none that will venture upon ſuch hazardous Attendance; I think the neareſt Neighbours are oblig'd to do it; *i.e.* the *ſingle*, and diſengag'd from a Neceſſity of *publick Converſe*: For thoſe that have Wife and Children and Families, their Charity muſt begin at *home*, to take care of their *own* Relatives is the prime Obligation; and the Safety of a whole Family is in moſt Caſes to be preferr'd to that of a ſingle Perſon. And thoſe whoſe neceſſary Employments call them into *much Company*, are bound to avoid what would endanger their bringing *Infection* to that Company, and that for the ſame Reaſon as before, becauſe the Safety of *many* is gene-

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rally to be preferr'd to that of *one*: And those upon whose Life depends, under God, the Maintenance and Support of divers Persons, for the sake of those Persons, should be very careful to preserve *themselves*. Only this ought to be observ'd by such as upon these and the like Accounts, cannot *personally* visit and attend the infected Person, *viz.* That they take great care to procure *others* that may do it; and, according to their Ability, and the Wants of the Person, to send Supplies of all things necessary. And there are very many, who, though they will not venture their Lives for *Conscience* sake, and to gain the Reward of being merciful in the other World, yet for *Mony* they will do it; and therefore such Encouragements must not be wanting from those that are of Ability.

As for *Physicians* and *Clergy-Men*, whose Professions engage them to converse with great Numbers of People; how far they are oblig'd in this Matter, I think may be resolv'd thus:

If *only one* Person in a Parish or Neighbourhood, or but a *few* in comparison with the whole *Body* of Men, be *contagiously* sick; to me it seems, that neither Physician nor Divine are in such case oblig'd personally to visit them, but rather to *forbear*, and only to convey to them, by other Hands, what is needful for their Bodily and Ghostly Health respectively. The Reason is, because the Physicians and Divines being often sent for

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to divers Families, muſt either *not* go after they have viſited an infected Perſon, and ſo neglect their Duty, and *many* ſuffer, and ſome periſh for want of their Aſſiſtance; or, if they *ſhould* go, would very probably endanger the whole Neighbourhood: And therefore, the Safety of *great Numbers* of People being to be preferr'd before that of *one* or but a *few*, they ought, I think, in this Caſe to keep at diſtance.

But when a Contagion ſpreads ſo that it becomes *epidemical*, and the *greater* Number of Perſons are ſeiz'd with it, then the Caſe is *alter'd*, and then I think both Phyſicians and Divines are bound to viſit *perſonally*. For in ſuch Caſe, to ſend Relief by *other* Hands, whether Medicines or ghoſtly Comfort and Advice; would, by reaſon of the Numbers of the ſick, become *impracticable*; and 'twould be unreaſonable for the ſake of a *few* that were well, to deprive a greater Number that are ſick of the great Benefit of perſonal Viſits of Phyſicians, which for many Reaſons prove more effectual than preſcribing at a *Diſtance*; and of the Comfort of the Prayers, and more cloſe and *particular* Diſcourſes of Divines, which no doubt are much more beneficial, and make a deeper Impreſſion upon the Soul, than *ſeveral* Advices and Exhortations ſent in Writing.

And *Divines* in this Caſe ſeem to be more oblig'd than *Phyſicians* (though the Obligation is very ſtrong upon Phyſicians too) and that becauſe the Safety of the

Soul is infinitely to be preferr'd before that of the *Body*, And if it perishes it perishes for *ever*, and will at length involve the Body too in the same eternal Ruin. And, for a Shepherd to *desert* his Flock in their *greatest Necessity*, to *leave* the Care of their Souls when there is the greatest Need of his *Help*, and the infernal Lyon roaring about seeking whom he may devour: This, I think, is the greatest *Barbarity*, and most base betraying that great Trust, that is possible.

The good Shepherd, says our Lord, *giveth his Life for his Sheep*: And *he*, the great Shepherd, and Bishop of our Souls, set the Example; *but the Hireling fleeth because he is a Hireling, and careth not for the Sheep, and the Wolf catcheth and scatters and devours them*, John 10. 12, 13. We should remember, that God is infinitely *powerful*, and can protect, even from the noisom Pestilence, if he thinks fit; and nothing more intitles a Man to the peculiar Protection of the Almighty, than a faithful Discharge of his Duty. And, however it may fare with us *here*, there is a glorious Recompence reserved for so great a Charity in a *better* World.

Proceed we now to the *third* and last thing to be done upon this Subject, which is to shew, what great *Encouragement* we have to this excellent Duty of Charity, or what a Blessedness it is to be able thus to *give*, rather than to *Receive*; and that both with Respect to *this* World and that to *come*.

For,

For, in the firſt place, with Relation to this World, What can be a greater Pleaſure to a Generous Spirit, than to be the Happy Inſtrument of reſcuing others from *Miſery* and *Want*, from periſhing with *Hunger*, or by other Calamities, and reſtoring 'em to Life and Comfort, and Health and Liberty? What Delight more high and noble, than that which will ariſe from our changing the *Sighs*, and *Groans*, and *Laments* of the Miſerable, into *Rejoycings*; and the *Curſes* and horrid *Blaſphemies*, and impious Reflections upon Providence, utter'd by thoſe whom Extremity of Poverty has made deſperate; into *Praiſes* and *Bleſſing* of God, and Acknowledgments of his *Goodneſs* and Care of the Children of Men?

What can cauſe greater Complacency and Satisfaction in the Soul, than for a Man to be as a *Father* to the *Fatherleſs*, not only in *maintaining* them, but in providing for them good and pious *Education*, and honeſt Trades, whereby theſe very Children become Men of Probity, and *uſeful* to the State, who otherwiſe, if left at looſe and unregarded, would in all Probability have been the Peſts and Diſturbers of the Community: Miſerable themſelves, and the Occaſion of much Miſery to others? And what more grateful to a pious Man, than to relieve the forlorn Poverty of ſuch as are at once depriv'd of their Husbands, and the Means of providing for their Families, and to be bleſſed by thoſe that were ready to periſh,

Job 29.31. rish, and *cause the Widows Heart to sing for Joy?* This is *pure* and *undefil'd Religion*, says Jam. 1.27. St. *James*, *to visit the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction*; nay, 'tis a near Psal. 146. 9. semblance of the Charity of *God himself*, who *preserveth the Strangers, and relieveth the Fatherless and Widow.*

And indeed, every Expression of Mercy and Compassion resembles us to *God*, whose *Mercy is above all his Works*; and to the Compassionate Jesus, who so pitied the miserable Estate of Mankind, as to leave his Father's Glories, and take on him the Form of a Servant, and suffer in our stead, that we might be Partakers of Life and Pardon, and Immortal Happiness, and *who went about doing Good* all the Days of his Humiliation. And certainly, to be like God, and the great Redeemer of the World, Christ Jesus, and that in the most Amiable and Glorious Perfection, must needs fill a Man's Breast with *Heavenly* Joy, since the Happiness of that blessed place consists in the Souls being *trans-*1 Joh. 3.2. *form'd* into the Divine *Image and Likeness from Glory to Glory*, 2 Cor. 3. 18.

But Secondly, (and which, with some may be the most prevailing Argument) there is great Encouragement to Charity, with Relation to *this* World, because 'tis the most *thriving* of all Christian Graces, and is always attended with *Prosperity*, and a Blessing.

David says expressly, *Psal.* 37. 25. *I have been Young, and now am Old, and yet saw, never*

never the Righteous forsaken, nor his Seed begging their Bread, i. e. as it follows in the next Verse, the Righteous Man that is *ever merciful and lendeth:* And not only *himself*, but his *Posterity* is blessed. And this, a learned Author of our own, *Extends to all Ages, and challenges any Historian of Past, or Observator of present Times to give one Instance of any Christian Alms Giver, that ever brought himself or his Posterity to* Want, *nay, that did not* thrive *and prosper the better by that means.* And this is confirm'd by *Solomon*, Prov. 11. 24, 25. *There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to Poverty: The Liberal Soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall be water'd also himself.* That is, as the same Author has it, *unless by Negligence or Suretiship, or some other* Sin *that he lives in, he brings a Curse and Poverty upon himself, and Mercifulness prove not Antidote sufficient against all other Poison.* Dr. Hammond, Pract. Cat. Lib. 3. Sect. 1.

And he that is thus assur'd of the peculiar Care of God concerning him, and that he shall always have a comfortable Provision as long as he lives, in Recompence of his liberal Charity to the Poor and Needy; has questionless very great Encouragement to perform the Duty. And as for the unavoidable Troubles of this Life which will mix with the most perfect Prosperity *here*, as Sickness, Vexation and Disappointments, and Temporal Losses, and such like; *The Lord will deliver him that considereth the* Poor, Psal. 41. 1, 3.

Poor, ſays *David*, *in the Time of Trouble*, *and ſtrengthen him upon the Bed of Languiſhing*, *and make all his Bed in his Sickneſs*. And though many may be the Troubles, even of the thus Righteous, which God may permit them to be exercis'd with for many excellent Purpoſes, *yet he will ſurely deliver them out of all*.

As for the Encouragement to this Charity, with Reſpect to the *next* World, it is thus expreſs'd by our Saviour, *Mat.* 5. 7. *Bleſſed are the merciful for they ſhall obtain Mercy*; that is, at the Time when every Man will ſtand in the greateſt Need of Mercy, the Day of Judgment. For then there will be particular Enquiry made into the Diſcharge of every one's Stewardſhip, in Point of Mercy and Compaſſion to the Indigent and Calamitous; and the great Judge of all the World, has declar'd, that when he ſhall come in the Clouds of Heaven, to render to every Man according to his Works; he will eſteem the Expreſſes of our Charity to his neceſſitous Servants as done to himſelf, and will reward the Merciful, not only with a *publick Commendation*, at that General Aſſembly of all the World, but will receive them to a Participation of the Glories and Felicities of his Eternal Kingdom: Saying, *Come ye Bleſſed Children of my Father*, *inherit the Kingdom prepar'd for you from the Beginning of the World*, Mat. 25. 34. And ſurely no Man can want Encouragement to the Duty when it ſhall be rewarded in ſuch a Manner as this.

I ſhall now infer ſome few things from the whole, and ſo conclude this Argument. And firſt, from the ſtrict Charge that God has given, in the Revelations of his Will, to every capable Perſon, to ſupply the Neceſſities of *all* that want Relief, and that according to the *Wants* of the Needy, and in a Meaſure ſuitable to his *Ability*, and inforced this Charge with the moſt prevailing Motives that can be made uſe of: From hence I infer the great *Unreaſonableneſs*, as well as *Impiety*, of charging *God* with the Miſeries of Mankind in this Inſtance.

For, what would they have God do more in this Matter than he has already done? Would they have him exerciſe his Omnipotence in *wholly preventing* Poverty? That is, would they have him interpoſe in all the Contingencies of this Mortal Life, and immediately *command* the *Sea*, for Example, to be *calm*, when a Veſſel is in Danger, whoſe Wreck would be the *undoing* of ſeveral; or ſend an Angel to ſteer her from Shelves and Quickſands, to preſerve her from Pirates, and conduct her in Safety to the Haven? Would they have the *Land* miraculouſly ſecur'd from all Misfortunes too, from the Villanies of Men, from Caſual *Fires*, from *Inundations* and *Earthquakes*; and would they have Men *forcibly* with-held from being guilty of ſuch *Vices* as ruin Thouſands, ſuch as Pride and Luxury, and Wantonneſs and Exceſs?

Or if (as well they may) they think *this* too unreasonable to be desir'd, would they have God, when Men are thus *reduc'd to Poverty*, immediately work *Miracles* for their *Relief?* Would they have *Ravens* bring
1 Kings 17. 6. Food to the Hungry as they did to *Elijah*; or would they have *every* Poor Widows Cruise of Oyl, and Barrel of Meal be as lasting as the Widow's of *Sarepta* was;
——16. or would they have Water spring from *Rocks*, and be immediately turn'd into *Wine*, to chear and refresh such as are parch'd with Thirst? Would they have our *Lord* come down a *second* Time from *Heaven*, to heal *Diseases*, or an *Angel* always set open the *Prison* Doors when good Men are confined and macerated, or the like?

That such extraordinary things have been *sometimes* done, is sufficient to evince, that God is not an *idle Spectator* of Humane Affairs; but to expect it should be *always* so, is foolishly presumptuous.

But, it may be, those that are asham'd of *this*, would yet, by all means, have God take a *severer* Course with his unfaithful Stewards than he does; and at least *displace* them, and *give their Riches to others, that Men might see and fear, and do no more wickedly.* Thus *Man will be replying against God, and the Clay saying to the Potter, Why hast thou made me thus?*

But, I would fain know, whether these Counsellours of the All-wise God, would have *all* that are unfaithful in their Stewardship,

ſhip, us'd in this Manner, or only *ſome* for a Terrour to the reſt? If *all* the World would quickly be in *Confuſion*, by ſuch frequent Changes in States and Governments, and Private Families, as would then be made; if *ſome* only, *in Terrorem*, and to affright the reſt into a more Conſcientious Diſcharge of their Duty, why that is *often* done; nothing is more common than the Riſe and Fall of Men and Families, and ſometimes their Decay is made very remarkable by ſome *extraordinary* Accidents. Which, if Men would obſerve it, is warning enough to them to be faithful in their Stewardſhip: but if they will be thoughtleſs and regard it *not*, the Blame ought to be *their's*, not *God's*, and their's will be the *Puniſhment* too at the long Run, when he ſhall call every Man before him to make up his Accounts.

Wherefore, let no Man any more, for the future, paſs Impious and Raſh Cenſures upon the *All-wiſe* and *Good* Governour of the Univerſe, becauſe his *Servants* neglect their Duty in this Matter; but rather, humbly and earneſtly intreat him to incline their Hearts to a better Obſervance of his Holy and Juſt, and Merciful Commands. And if the Poor ſhall ſtill go unpitied and unreliev'd, let us commit their Cauſe unto *him*, who, if with Patience they perſevere in well-doing, will at length abundantly recompence their Sufferings *here*, with Glory, Honour and Immortality in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Secondly,

Secondly, From what has been ſaid, I infer, the great Baſeneſs and *Ingratitude* of thoſe who thus wickedly betray their Truſt, and thereby bring ſuch Odious *Aſperſions* upon their great *Benefactor*, and ſo much *Sin* and *Miſery* upon Mankind.

Good God! That ever Men ſhould be ſo low ſunk, ſo vilely brutiſh and degenerate, as to prefer a Shining Coach and Gay Livery's, and Vanity and profuſe Folly in many other Inſtances, before the Honour of their God, and the Comfort and Reward of a Poor Afflicted Chriſtian! That they ſhould be contented to hear the Groans of the Diſtreſſed, and the Blaſphemies of Atheiſts, againſt that God who gave them all they have; rather than by *retrenching* any thing from their *Exceſſive* Way of Living, to ſilence either! 'Tis a Monſtrous *Complicated* Impiety this, and will at laſt pull down a Heavy Vengeance.

Wherefore, from the whole, I infer, in the laſt place, how highly it concerns us all to imitate the Example of the *diſcreetly* and *thoroughly* charitabe *Samaritan* in the Parable, and be more careful of this our Duty for the future. For if we prove *ill* Stewards of the Talents God has commited to our Truſt for the Relief of the Calamities of our Brethren, we ſhall not only have the Sins of *Unfaithfulneſs* and baſe *Ingratitude* to anſwer for; but the Prophane Flouts and Cavils of the Atheiſtical, the Curſes and Imprecations of the deſperately Miſerable, the

Thefts

Thefts and Murthers, and other Villanies of such, whose *Unrelieved* Poverty forced to be thus wicked; and the Blood of such as *dy'd* for want of Succour: *All this* will be charg'd upon us, and overwhelm us with Eternal Horrour and Confusion.

Wherefore, to conclude; *while we have Time, let us do good unto all Men, but especially to those of the Houshold of Faith*; let us *make Friends with the Mammon of Unrighteousness*, that when all *this* World's Good shall *fail* us, *we may be receiv'd into Everlasting Habitations.* Let us *lay up for our selves a good Foundation against the Time to come*, and be Faithful Stewards of *the manifold Grace of God* committed to us; lest our great Lord should come in a Time when we think not of him, and place us on the Left Hand, and pass this Dismal and Irreversible Sentence upon us; *Depart from me ye cursed into Everlasting Fire, prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels. For I was Hungry and ye gave me no Meat, Thirsty and ye gave me no Drink, a Stranger and ye took me not in, Naked and ye cloathed me not, Sick and in Prison, and ye visited me not.*

From which terrible Condemnation, and that hardned Disposition that deserves it, and will inevitably bring it down upon us if not speedily amended, the Merciful and Good Lord deliver us all, for the Sake of his Compassion in Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen, Amen.

The

The PRAYER.

O Most Compassionate Jesus! The great Pattern of Charity, who in the Days of thy Flesh wentest about doing Good to Mankind, relieving the Necessities both of Body and Soul, and hast commanded thy Disciples to go and do likewise; give me the Grace, I beseech thee, according to my Ability, to be charitable to all that are really Necessitous, without excepting any, but always to guide these good Works with Discretion: Lest by my ill-plac'd Alms, I encourage Debauchery and Sloth, and have the less to give to those that truly want. And since the Poverty and Sickness of the Soul, is of all, the most dangerous and deplorable, O that I may be so happy, as by Fraternal Correption, and Seasonable wholsom Counsel and Advice, according to my Opportunities and Capacity, to relieve the Spiritual Necessities of my Brethren, and convert a Sinner from the Errour of his Way, and save a Soul from Death! And may I always *chearfully* perform this Godlike Duty, and take Delight in being Instrumental in the Blessed Work of chearing the Hearts of the Distressed, and making light the Burthens of the Afflicted, and thereby vindicating thy Providence from the Vile Aspersions of Wicked Men, and occasioning much Thanksgiving unto God. O may I never forget that I am the Steward only of that Portion of this

this World's Good, with which thou haſt intruſted me, for the Good of thy great Family: And that thou wilt one Day call me to give an Account of the Diſcharge of this my Stewardſhip, particularly enquire into my Acts of Charity, and infinitely reward me if I be found Faithful in this Truſt, and for ever puniſh me with the Devil and his Angels if I be not. And that I may abound the more in this excellent Grace of Charity: Aſſiſt me effectually and immediately to cut off all Exceſſes and vain Superfluities of Life, and never let me be ſo forſaken of all Piety and Humanity, as to ſuffer my poor Fellow-Servants to want Neceſſaries, rather than retrench my vile Extravagancies! May this moſt excellent and royal Law of thine be always preſent with me as my Rule, to do to others as I would be done by in like Circumſtance; and in all the Expreſſes of my Charity, let thy Glory, and the Good of my Brethren and the Public, be my ſole End; and remove far from me all Pride and Vain-Glory, for thy Mercies Sake. This and whatever elſe is neceſſary to the Perfection of this great Duty, grant me, I beſeech thee, O moſt Compaſſionate Saviour Jeſus. *Amen.*

PARABLE

PARABLE VIII.

Of the Talents.

Matth. xxv. 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30.

The Kingdom of Heaven is as a Man travelling into a far Country, who called his own Servants, and deliver'd unto them his Goods.

And unto one he gave five Talents, to another two, and to another one; to every Man according to his ſeveral Ability, and ſtraightway took his Journey.

Then he that had received the five Talents went and traded with them, and made them other five Talents.

And likewiſe he that had received two, he alſo gained other two.

But he that had received one, went and digged in the Earth, and hid his Lords Money.

After

After a long time, the Lord of theſe Servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

And ſo he that had received five Talents came and brought other five Talents, ſaying, Lord, thou deliver'dſt unto me five Talents; behold, I have gain'd beſides them five Talents more.

His Lord ſaid unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful Servant, thou haſt been faithful over a few things, I will make thee Ruler over many things: enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord.

He alſo that had receiv'd two Talents came and ſaid, Lord, thou deliver'dſt unto me two Talents; behold, I have gained two other Talents beſides them.

His Lord ſaid unto him, Well done, good and faithful Servant, thou haſt been, &c.

Then he which had received the one Talent came and ſaid, Lord, I know thee, that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou haſt not ſown, and gathering where thou haſt not ſtrew'd.

And I was afraid, and went and hid thy Talent in the Earth; lo, there thou haſt that is thine.

His Lord anſwer'd, and ſaid unto him, thou wicked and ſlothful Servant, thou knoweſt that I reap where I did not ſow, and

and gather where I have not ſtrewed: Thou oughteſt therefore to have put my Money to the Exchangers, and then at my coming I ſhould have received mine own with Uſury.

Take therefore the Talent from him, and give it unto him that hath ten Talents.

For unto every one that hath ſhall be given, and he ſhall have abundance; but from him that hath not ſhall be taken away even that which he hath.

And caſt ye the unprofitable Servant into outer Darkneſs; there ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of Teeth.

THE *Interpretation* of this Parable may be this. By *a Man travelling into a far Country*, is repreſented our Saviour's leaving this World, and Aſcending into Heaven after he had finiſh'd the great Work of our Redemption; and by his *calling to him his own Servants, and delivering to them his Goods*, is ſignified his enabling his Diſciples with ſufficient *Grace* and the Aſſiſtance of his *Holy Spirit*, to perform that Duty and Service which he requires of them in his Abſence.

By his giving to one *Five* Talents, to another *Two*, and to a third but *One*, according to their ſeveral Abilities, is expreſſed, that God affords his *Grace* according to

to Mens *natural* Capacity of ſerving him, (for there is a previous Ability firſt ſuppoſed, and ſuitable to *that* is the number of Talents that are given) and to *the Kind and Degree* of *Service* that he thereupon expects from them. He that by the previous Gift of God in his *natural* Endowments, is capable of doing him great Service, and of being an excellent *Example* to others; and is therefore by the Providence of God deſign'd for, or actually plac'd in an *eminent Station*, and employ'd in a Service of great Weight and *Difficulty*; to him is given *greater* Aid from Above, becauſe he is more capable of *improving* what he receives to God's *Glory* and the Good of the *Church*; and has likewiſe greater *Need* of the Divine Aſſiſtance, by reaſon of the *Difficulty* of the Duty he is to perform. And he that *naturally* is *not* ſo capable, receives proportionably *leſs* Aid from Heaven; but yet ſuch as is ſufficient to enable him to diſcharge *that Duty* which, according to his *natural Capacity*, is required of him.

By *His Trading* that had received *Five* Talents, and gaining *other Five*, and his gaining *other Two* that had *received* but *Two*; is ſhewn, that according to the *Meaſure* of Grace and *ſupernatural* Aſſiſtance that Men have received, ſo ſhould their *Improvement* be, and that *faithful* Chriſtians will be careful to *make* ſuch Improvement: And by *His* hiding his Talent in the Ground that had but *One*, is repreſented the inexcuſable

Sloth and Idleneſs of wicked Men, who will not take ſo much Pains as to improve, tho but *One* Talent, in order to their Salvation.

By the Lord of thoſe Servants *coming after a long time and reckoning with them*, is repreſented the Coming of Chriſt to *Judgment* at the *End of the World*, then to enquire into every Man's Works, and Reward or Puniſh as there is juſt Occaſion.

By His receiving the *Diligent* into his *Joy*, is expreſs'd the Reward of the Righteous in the Bliſsful Kingdom of Heaven; and by the *Slothful* and *Wicked* Servant, (who was therefore *Wicked* becauſe *Slothful*) by his bringing his *One* Talent to his Lord *unimprov'd*, and excuſing his Unprofitableneſs by ſaying, that he *knew him to be a hard Man*, unreaſonably *griping*, expecting to *reap where he had not ſown*, and the like; and that therefore he brought him his own again as he gave it him, fearing to employ it, leſt he ſhould have loſt it, and yet been oblig'd to make it good to his Lord: By this is repreſented the *Baſe* Thoughts too many have of *God* and *Religion*, as if it were impoſſible to bear his Yoke, and keep his Commands, he exacting ſuch *unreaſonable* Services from us; but this is only to excuſe *one* Wickedneſs by *another*, and ſhews what wretched Shifts Ill Men are put to, to palliate their great Neglect of their Duty to their Maſter; as appears by his Lord's anſwering and ſaying, *Thou wicked and ſlothful Servant, thou kneweſt that*

that I reap where I ſowed not, thou oughteſt therefore to have put my Money to the Exchangers, that at my coming I might have receiv'd my own with Uſury: By which is repreſented the Neceſſity of Mens improving their Talent for *that very Reaſon* (were it true) which they are apt to plead in *Excuſe* for their ſlothful Negligence. For to him that looks upon God as ſo *auſtere* a Being, there is more than ordinary Obligation to *improve* what he has committed to his Truſt for that Purpoſe: And becauſe a Man eſteems God as an *hard* and *ſevere* Maſter, therefore to be idle and negligent in his Service, is a very *prepoſterous* Courſe, and looks as if he had a mind to provoke his Anger againſt him.

But indeed, *This* is the *Truth*: God is ſo very far from being an *unreaſonably ſevere Maſter*, that He is *a moſt indulgent Parent*, and commands nothing but what is very practicable, and highly conducive to the Good and *Happineſs* of his Creatures; which ſhould create a *Filial Love* and Reverence in us towards him, rather than a *ſlaviſh Dread*. But however, he is not ſo *unreaſonably fond* neither, as to paſs by the Provocations of obſtinate *irreclaimable* Rebels, and clear thoſe that are *Impenitent* as well as *Guilty*, that have heinouſly *offended* him, and yet take no care to *amend* and recover his Favour. Though *he does not reap where he did not ſow, nor gather where he did not ſtrew*, yet he expects a due Improve-

ment of what he commits to our Charge, and is ready likewise proportionably to reward our *Industry*. And this is apt indeed to *quicken* and *encourage* us in our Duty, but by no means to *scare* and affright us *from* it: For nothing can be more *reasonable*, than for God to expect we should *improve* what he bestows upon us for *that very end*, and that we should obey those Commands of His which are so highly *reasonable* in themselves; and which he likewise *assists* us to *perform*. Let no Man therefore say, God is an unreasonably *rigid Master*, and his Commands *intolerable Burdens*; for 'tis abominably *false*, (as will appear more fully in the Sequel:) But were it *true*, it would be no Excuse for Sloth and *Idleness* in his Service, much less for wholly *deserting* it; but rather, an Argument for *double* Care and Diligence in it.

By the Lord of that Slothful Servant commanding his *One* unimprov'd Talent to be taken from him, and given to him who by his Industry had improv'd his *Five* Talents to *Ten*; is represented God's *depriving* those of his *Grace* and the Assistances of his Holy Spirit, who so much neglect it, and make no use of it to the great *Ends* for which it was given them, (viz.) *His Glory* and *Their own Happiness*; and making still greater *Additions* of his Grace to such as have well improv'd their former Stock. And by his commanding the *Unprofitable* Servant to be cast into *Outer Darkness*, where

where ſhall be *weeping and gnaſhing of Teeth*; is expreſs'd their Deplorable Condition in the Regions of eternal Miſery and Deſpair, who make no Improvement of the Talents committed to them; the *Deprivation of Grace* in *this* World, being a certain Forerunner of *Perdition* in the *other*. It nearly concerns therefore, every Man carefully to *improve* the Talent committed to him; becauſe *unto every one that hath ſhall be given, and he ſhall have Abundance, but from him that hath not, ſhall be taken away, even that which he hath.*

This Parable, thus interpreted, affords us theſe *Six* Heads of Diſcourſe.

Firſt, That God gives *ſufficient Grace* to every *ſenſible Chriſtian* wherewith to *work out his Salvation.*

Secondly, That God expects from every Man, that he ſhould *improve* what Grace he has receiv'd, and that proportionably to the *Meaſure* in which it was given him, and make uſe of it to the *Ends* for which it was given.

Thirdly, That there will be a Time, when our Lord will come to take *Account* of Men's Improvement of the Grace that was given them, and reward every Man according to his *Deſerts.*

Fourthly, That there ſhall be *Degrees* of Men's *Happineſs* or Miſery in the other World, according to the *Degrees* of their *Improvement* or Negligence and Careleſſneſs in *this.*

Fifthly, That 'tis abominably *Falſe* and *Impious* to charge God, as being unreaſonably *rigid* and ſevere in *taking* this *Account* of Men's *Improvement*, and expecting to find a *Good Uſe* made of what he committed to their *Truſt*. And,

Laſtly, That the Condition of the *Diligent* will be unſpeakably *happy*, and that of the *Unprofitable* unſpeakably *miſerable*; and that both in *this* World and the *next*.

Firſt, God gives *ſufficient Grace* to every *ſenſible Chriſtian*, wherewith to *work out his Salvation*. I ſay to every *ſenſible Chriſtian*, becauſe I would confine my Diſcourſe to the State of ſuch as are *Chriſtians*; and ſuch of *them* as have the *Uſe* of their *Senſes* and their *Reaſon*: For as for thoſe that are *out of the Pale of Chriſt's Church*, though Charity will incline us to hope well of them, and that God's Mercy will extend even to *Heathens* that never yet *heard* of the *Goſpel of Chriſt*, and his Spirit aſſiſt them to live according to that *Natural* Law written in the Heart of every Man; yet we can *determine* nothing in this Caſe with Relation to them, and have nothing elſe to do, but to leave them to the *Infinite Mercy* of God, and *pray* for their *Converſion*. And as for ſuch as have been receiv'd into the *Fold of Chriſt*, and have afterwards prov'd *Idiots*, and without the Uſe of their *Reaſon*, their Caſe is likewiſe wholly in the *Dark* to us; and though we need not queſtion, but God's Infinite Goodneſs, will incline him to *pity* their

their Deplorable Condition, yet which *Way* he will expreſs his Mercy to them we muſt not preſume to ſay. *Hidden* things belong to *God*; the *reveal'd* are for *us and our Children*: Among which I take this to be *one*, That *God gives ſufficient Grace to every ſenſible Chriſtian, wherewith to work out his Salvation.*

And here not to enter into the *Endleſs* and moſt *Abſtruſe* Diſpute about *Predeſtination* (which the leſs Men trouble their Heads about, the better 'tis for 'em in all Reſpects) I ſhall only urge two or three *plain Places of Scripture* to confirm this Poſition, and add to 'em *one as plain Reaſon.*

The Places of *Scripture* are firſt, that in 2 *Pet.* 3. 9. where the Apoſtle ſays, that *God is not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to Repentance*; to which is agreeable that of St. *Paul* to *Timothy*, 1 Epiſt. 2, 4. *God will have*, or deſires, that *all Men ſhould be ſav'd, and come to the Knowledge of the Truth*; Now, the next Scripture I will quote, which is 2 *Cor.* 3. 5. tells us, That *we are not ſufficient of our ſelves, to think any thing as of our ſelves, but our Sufficiency is of God*; and *Phil.* 2. 13. *'tis God that worketh in us, to will and to do of his good Pleaſure*; and accordingly, ſays *John the Baptiſt*, ſpeaking of our Lord, *of his Fulneſs have we all receiv'd, and Grace for Grace*, *John* 1. 16. and *Epheſ.* 4. 7. *To every one of us is given Grace according to the Meaſure of the Gift of Chriſt.* Which Scriptures put together make this Argument.

2 Pet. 3.9. 1 Tim. 2.4 2 Cor. 3.5. Phil. 2.13. God is desirous of the Happiness and Salvation of *every* Man; but, without his *Assistance*, and the Aids of his *Grace*, and Holy Spirit, *no* Man can *arrive* at that Happiness:

Joh. 1.16. Ephes. 4.7. Therefore, he gives *sufficient Grace* and Assistance to *every Man*, wherewith, if he be not *Idle* and Wanting to himself, he *may work out his Salvation*. For, we can't but allow, that what God *desires* for *every Man*, and which *no Man* can *attain* without his *Aid* and *Assistance*, he will give *every Man* sufficient *Assistance* with his own Industrious Concurrence to *compass*. Otherwise, he would *desire* that for *some*, *i. e.* those to whom he should deny his Divine Assistance, which he knows 'tis impossible for them to attain to; which I think can't be consistent with his Infinite *Wisdom*.

This seems to me to be sufficient *Scripture* Proof for this Position. And to this I shall add this one *Plain Reason*.

For, because the *Commands* of Religion, in order to the attaining the *Rewards* of it, are given in *General*, to *every Man*, and there is no *Exception* made, but *every one that names the Name of Christ must depart from all Iniquity*; therefore, *every Man* must be suppos'd *able* to keep and *observe* those Commands, unless we will be so Blasphemous as to say with the Unprofitable Servant in the Parable, that God is so *unreasonable* as to *reap where he did not sow*, to command *Impossibilities*; and then so *unjust* and *cruel*, as to punish Men Eternally for *not obeying* them.

But

But now, that no Man is of *himſelf* able to keep the Commandments, is evident from the whole Tenor of Scripture, and from the ſad Experience of even the *Beſt* of Men; and conſequently, this Ability muſt be allow'd to proceed from the Aid of ſome *other*, namely, from him who is the *only Giver of every good and perfect Gift, and who giveth to every Man liberally, and upbraideth not.* Indeed, he giveth to every Man *ſeverally as he pleaſes*, to ſome *more*, to ſome *leſs*, to ſome *five* Talents, to ſome *two*, and to others but *one*; according to Men's Ability to improve them, and as in his Infinite Wiſdom he ſees moſt conducive to his *own Glory*, and the *Edification* of the *Church*; but he is wholly *wanting* in this Divine Gift to no Man that is capable of improving it, but beſtows upon every ſenſible Chriſtian, *Grace ſufficient*, wherewith if he makes *good Uſe* of it, *to work out his Salvation.*

And this ſhould have this fourfold good Effect upon us. It ſhould make us unfeignedly *thankful* to the Infinite Goodneſs of God, for this his unſpeakable Gift; looking upon the *Grace* he hath beſtow'd on us, as an Earneſt of our Salvation. It ſhould put us upon begging devoutly and earneſtly and frequently at the Throne of Grace, for ſtill *greater* Degrees of this *Heavenly Aid*, in order to his *greater Glory*, and our more *perfect Happineſs*; remembring that this is of all the greateſt Treaſure; and what a *Frail* Sinful Creature, ſhould above all things hunger

ger and thirſt after. For though every Man at firſt, receives as much Grace as he is able to improve; yet he that has improv'd what he at firſt receiv'd, is by that his Diligence grown capable of more, and able to make a ſuitable Improvement: As he in the Parable that had improv'd his Five Talents to Ten, was capable of Receiving and Improving ſtill *more*; and accordingly had his Talent given to him who buried it in the Ground, and brought it without any Improvement to his Lord. Five Talents was at firſt proportionable to his Ability, but by duely improving them, his Ability was much enlarg'd, and he became capable of, and received more. And to God ſhould all the *Praiſe* be given, of all the good Things we perform by means of this his Divine Aſſiſtance; reflecting upon the Words of St. *Paul*, 1 Cor. 4. 7. *Who maketh thee to differ, and what haſt thou that thou didſt not receive?* And finally, becauſe to *all of us* is given *Grace ſufficient* to our Happineſs; therefore *to work out* our Salvation with it in *fear* and *trembling*, leſt by our Negligence and Sloth we *fail* of this Grace of God, and it be withdrawn and taken from us.

For in the *ſecond* Place, God expects that every Man ſhould *improve* the *Grace* he hath receiv'd, and that proportionably to the *meaſure* in which he has receiv'd it, and make uſe of it to the *Ends* for which it was beſtow'd upon him.

For

For thus we ſee in the Parable, how *angry* the Lord was when his Servant brought him the Talent he committed to him, *unimprov'd*; he calls him *ſlothful and wicked Servant*, and deprives him of his Talent, and gives it for an Encouragement, to him that had made the *greateſt Improvement*, and ſentences the Unprofitable Servant to *outer Darkneſs, where is weeping and gnaſhing of Teeth.* And agreeably ſays St. *Paul*, 1 *Cor.* 12. 7. *The manifeſtation of the Spirit is given to every one to profit withal.* Chriſtianity is not an idle lazy Profeſſion, does not conſiſt in fine Words and ſpecious Pretences, but in an active lively Piety, ſuitable to every Man's ſeveral Ability. He that has received *much Grace* muſt be eminent for *much Holineſs*; his Piety muſt ariſe proportionably to the Communications of the Holy Spirit which he enjoys, and his *Diligence* be commenſurate to his *Strength.* He that has received *five Talents*, muſt gain *other five* with them; and he that has receiv'd *two*, *other two*; and no Man muſt be without *ſome* Increaſe, though he has receiv'd but *One.*

The *End* for which God beſtows his Grace upon us, is *threefold.* (1) For the *Advancement* of his *own Glory*; (2) For the Good and *Edification* of the *Church*; (3) For our *own* Happineſs and *Salvation.* And therefore, the more Grace and Aſſiſtances from Above a Man has receiv'd, the more ſhould he endeavour to *glorifie God* with it,

to

to *edifie* the *Church*, and by a holy Life, to ſecure his *own Salvation*. And he that either makes *no* uſe of the Grace that God hath given him, like him in the Parable, who inſtead of *trading* with his Talent, hid it in the Earth; or elſe *abuſes* it to *vile* and *wicked* Purpoſes; is a *wicked* and *unprofitable* Servant, and ſhall be caſt into *outer Darkneſs*.

To know *when* a Man has receiv'd *plenty* of this Divine *Grace*, and to what *Improvement* he is conſequently oblig'd; is, for him in the firſt place to reflect upon his *natural* Parts and Abilities, upon his Capacity for *underſtanding* and conſidering the great *Truths of Religion*; and then, what *Inſtruction* he hath met with in the School of Righteouſneſs; what plenty of Religious Diſcourſes and Exhortations he has enjoy'd; and how frequently he has felt Motions from *within* to a ſtill more and more holy and exemplary Life: He that hath experienc'd all this in a *great* degree, that hath had his pregnant *natural* Capacity well cultivated by an early and excellent *Inſtruction*, and had the whole of Religion plainly laid before him in all the *Doctrines*, *Duties*, *Rewards* and *Puniſhments* of it; and been often and affectionately exhorted to live accordingly in all holy Converſation and Godlineſs, and has frequently felt ſecret *internal* Motions and Perſwaſions to it; this Man has received much more than *One* Talent at the hands of God, and God will expect from

from him a *proportionable Improvement*; and he muſt *abound* in every good Word and Work: *For unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall be much requir'd; and to whom Men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.* But becauſe all Men are not of equal Abilities *naturally*, neither have the *ſame* Opportunities of *Inſtruction* and Improvement, nor the ſame *immediate Impulſes* of the Bleſſed Spirit; where there is any *defect* in theſe Reſpects, God will *abate* proportionably in his *Expectations*; and he that received the *One* Talent, had he gained but *One other* with it, would have been call'd a *good and faithful Servant*, and been receiv'd into the *Joy* of his Lord.

Let us all therefore, endeavour to *grow* in *Grace* according to the *meaſure* of this unſpeakable Gift; to perform our Duties, each in his *Station*, and according to his *Ability*, faithfully and induſtriouſly; that when our Lord comes to make Enquiry into each ones Improvement of his Talent, and call for every ones particular Account, we may all, from the leaſt to the greateſt, chearfully give it up, and receive the immenſe Reward of a ſincere Diligence: For,

In the third Place, There will moſt certainly be a Time when our Great Lord will come to take Account of every Man's *Improvement* of the Grace that was given him, and *reward* every Man according to his Deſerving.

That

That there will certainly be a Day of Judgment both of Quick and Dead, when every Man ſhall be rewarded *according to that he hath done in the Body, whether it be good or evil*, is a Truth ſo evident from Scripture, that thoſe who have read, and do believe *thoſe* Writings, can make no doubt of it: And the Proof of this from *Reaſon*, has been ſo convincingly manag'd by ſeveral Learned Pens, particularly of late by Dr. *Sherlock* in his Excellent Diſcourſe upon Judgment, that I think nothing can be added to it; I ſhall only therefore Collect ſuch a Deſcription of that Great Day, and the Proceedings in it, out of the *Revelations* (where it is the moſt movingly repreſented) as may incline us all with the greateſt *Diligence*, and *immediately*, by *ſelf-Examination* and Amendment of every evil Way, to prepare for that great Audit, that we may give up our Accounts *with joy, and not with grief*. In the 20th Chapter of the *Revelations*, ver. 12. after the divine Apoſtle had given a Deſcription of the Appearing of the great Judge upon his Throne, *I ſaw a great White Throne*, ſays he, *and him that ſat on it; from whoſe face the Earth and the Heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them*: He proceeds, *I ſaw the dead, ſmall and great, ſtand before God, and the Books were opened. And another Book was opened, which is the Book of Life; and the dead were judged out of thoſe Things that were written in the Books, according to their Works;*

and

and the Sea gave up the dead that were in it, and Death and the Grave deliver'd up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their Works: And whosoever was not written in the Book of Life, was cast into the Lake of Fire.

That is, The Records shall then be laid open wherein every Man's Receipt of Grace is enter'd, and those whose Works shall be found *proportionably good* according to the *Assistance* they have receiv'd from *Above*; or, in the Stile of the Parable; that have made an answerable Improvement to the Number of Talents committed to them, their Names shall be written in the Book of Life, and they received into the eternal Joy of their Lord. But those who can then give no good Account of their Talents, shew no suitable Improvement in Holiness according to the measure of Grace they have received, shall never see Life, but be *cast into the Lake of Fire, which is the second Death.* And because so very few will be so *wise*, as to make due Preparation for this great Day of Account, by improving the Grace God has given them to the great Ends for which it was design'd; therefore, as 'tis describ'd *Rev.* 3. 15. *The Kings of the Earth, and the great Men, and the rich Men, and the chief Captains, and the mighty Men, and every Bond-man, and every Free-man,* many of all Qualities and Conditions, from the highest to the lowest; *shall hide themselves in Dens, in Rocks, and Mountains,*

and

and say to the Rocks and Mountains, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the Throne, and from the Wrath of the Lamb; for the great Day of his Wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand! May these Terrors of the Lord perswade us to provide *in this our day, for the Things that belong to our Peace, before they be hid from our eyes! looking for*, by frequent Meditation, and hastning unto, by a diligent Improvement of our Talents, *the coming of this dreadful day of God*; and being above all things careful, *That we be found of him in Peace, without spot and blameless; for God will bring every secret Thing into Judgment, whether it be good or evil*, and exactly adapt every Man's Recompense to his Work. Which brings me to the next Thing I am to consider in this Parable; namely,

Fourthly, That, at that great Day of Account, when every Man's Work is fully known, and his *Improvement* compar'd with what he has *receiv'd*; the Diligent shall not only in general be receiv'd into the Joy of their Lord, and the unprofitable cast into outer Darkness; but the *most* Diligent, those that have made the *greatest* Improvement, shall receive the *greatest share* of Happiness: And those that have been *most careless* and Unprofitable, shall be doom'd to the *greatest misery*. That is, in short, there will be *degrees* of Happiness or Misery respectively, awarded to Men according to the *degrees* of their Holiness or Impiety.

I know

I know this has been much queſtion'd by ſome, and wholly deny'd by others; and their main Reaſon againſt it I conceive to be this: That ſince the Happineſs of the *Juſt* in Heaven conſiſts in the *Viſion of God*, or the Excellencies and Beauties of the Divine Nature, which will fill a holy Soul with eternal and inexpreſſible *Delight*; for ſo St. *John* expreſſes the Bliſs of Heaven, by *ſeeing God as he is*, 1 Joh 3. 2. and St. *Paul*, by *ſeeing him face to face, and knowing him even as we are known*, 1 Cor. 13. 12. And ſince the Miſery of the *Wicked in Hell* conſiſts in an eternal *Baniſhment* from his Divine Preſence; for ſo the Sentence runs that ſhall be paſs'd upon them at the Day of Judgment, *Depart from me ye Curſed*, &c. Upon theſe Accounts it ſeems to them moſt agreeable to Truth, that *All* the *Juſt*, being admitted to the *Beatifick Viſion of God*, ſhould be *equally Happy*, and *All* the *Wicked* being for ever *exil'd to him*, ſhould be *equally Miſerable*.

But this Argument, in my Apprehenſion, is ſo far from *deſtroying* the Doctrine of the Degrees of Happineſs and Miſery in Heaven and Hell, that I think 'tis rather the beſt *Supporter* of it. For, ſince 'tis very true, that the Happineſs of Heaven conſiſts in the *Beatifick Viſion of God*, and the Miſery of Hell in an eternal *Baniſhment* from him; and ſince 'tis as true, that *ſome* good Men in *this* Life, approach nearer to him, and ſee more of his Excellencies, and bear

a greater Reſemblance to him than *others*, and ſo become *capable* of a more *intimate* Viſion of him in Heaven; and *ſome* bad Men, on the contrary, wander to a *greater diſtance* from him *here*, and become *more unlike* him by their *great* Impieties than other Sinners do; and ſo become more *incapable* of that *pure* and holy Viſion, than others that are *leſs* wicked: Since this is ſo, methinks it ſhould be moſt agreeable to Truth, that thoſe that were the *Holieſt Men* here, ſhould be the *Happieſt Saints* in Heaven, as bearing a nearer Reſemblance to the Divine Nature, and conſequently capable of a more *cloſe* and intimate Viſion of him; and that thoſe who by their great Impiety beyond other Men, were *moſt eſtranged* from God here, ſhould be baniſh'd *fartheſt* from him in the Regions of Deſpair and Darkneſs, as being the *moſt hateful* to him, becauſe the *moſt unlike*, nay *contrary* to him, and the *moſt uncapable* of ſeeing and enjoying him; and conſequently feel the *moſt exquiſite* Pangs of Horror and Deſpair, the *hotteſt* Boilings of Rage and Impatience, and *moſt bitter* Remorſe of Soul, for bringing this *moſt miſerable* Condition upon themſelves; when *once* they might with much Eaſe and Pleaſure have avoided it, and been for ever *happy* in the *Viſion and Enjoyment of God*.

Indeed, as to plain Proof from *Scripture* of the *Degrees of Miſery in Hell*, I muſt confeſs I cannot recollect any, and would

by

by no means *ſtrain* God's Word beyond its due Extent; but as to Degrees of *Glory and Happineſs* in Heaven, I think there are ſeveral Places of Scripture that plainly enough eſtabliſh that Doctrine; of which I ſhall mention but one, and that becauſe 'tis part of a Parable exactly the ſame in the *concealed ſenſe* of it, with that I am now diſcourſing upon, only ſomething differently related by S. *Luke*. 'Tis in the 19th Chapter, the 15th and 4 following Verſes; where we find, when the King came to take Account of his Servants Improvement of what he left in their Hands to trade with in his Abſence, he exactly proportion'd every Man's *Recompenſe* to the *Increaſe* he made of what was committed to his Charge; to him that had gain'd *Ten* Pounds, with the Pound his Lord left with him, was given Authority over as *many* Cities; and ſo to him that had gain'd *Five*, proportionably Authority over *Five:* Which I think can mean no leſs than this, that where there is different Degrees of Mens Improvement of *Grace* in *this* World, there ſhall be as different Degrees awarded of *Glory* and *Happineſs* in *Heaven*; and there being great Difference between the Degrees of Chriſtians *Improvement* here, there will be as great Difference in the Degrees of their *Happineſs* hereafter. And though every Saint in Heaven ſhall have as clear and intimate Viſion and Enjoyment of God as he is *capable* of, and partake in an agreeable

Meaſure of the *Happineſs* that will flow from ſuch Viſion and Enjoyment, and be as Happy as 'tis poſſible for him to be; yet the *Capacity* of every Saint will not be *equal:* Some Souls will be more enlarg'd than others, and able to receive more Rays of the Divine Glory; and ſo, though every of thoſe Veſſels of Honor ſhall be *full*, yet all will not *hold alike*; and one Star *there*, will differ from another Star in Glory.

'Tis true, indeed, that the Mind of *every* good Man ſhall then be clarified and refined, purg'd from the Droſs and Soil contracted during its Reſidence in the Fleſh, and rendred more agile and expedite in the Exerciſe of its ſeveral Faculties, and its Knowledge and Love of God vaſtly improved: But that Souls of *leſs* Improvement here, ſhall immediately upon their Departure from the Body, receive *extraordinary new Additions*, to equalize them to thoſe of *higher* Attainments, is hard to imagine; and would mightily diſcourage the generous Endeavours of *Heroick* Piety and *Exemplary* Religion. But, when every Man ſhall in that glorious Kingdom above, be rewarded according to the Degrees of his Piety; and a *great* Love to God, and *zealous* Proſecution of the Intereſt of Religion, and an *eminent* Sanctity, ſhall be crown'd with a *more* than *ordinary Glory* and Felicity in *Heaven*, 'twill mightily encourage a holy Soul to *forget*, with St. *Paul*, *the things that are behind, and preſs on to what is ſtill before*, always

always aiming at still greater Degrees of *Perfection*, till Mortality shall be *swallow'd up of Life*.

The Improvement of this *Speculation* to *Practice* is this; That since the Degrees of Glory and Happiness in Heaven, shall be answerable to the Degrees of Mens Holiness, and Improvement of their Talents upon Earth; we would run with *Diligence* the Race that is set before us, and gird up the Loins of our Mind, and set our selves to the Performance of every thing that is well-pleasing in the sight of God with *Cheerfulness*; and not pretend *Difficulty*, when the Reward is so exceeding great, and shall be proportion'd to the Degrees of our Vertue. For can we be *too happy?* Can we be *too like God?* Can our Crown be too glorious and resplendent? Away then with that mean-spirited Religion which thus lessens and *confines* our Happiness; let us unfold our Hands, and pluck them out of our Bosoms, and encourage our selves in a vigorous Pursuit of an *excellent Piety*; *forasmuch as we know, that our Labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.*

Fifthly, In the next Place, I am to shew, that 'tis abominably *false and impious*, with the Unprofitable Servant in the Parable, to charge God with being *unreasonably rigid* and *severe*, in taking so strict an Account of Mens *Improvement* of his Divine *Grace* and Assistances, and expecting to find a good Use made of what he committed to their Trust.

That God is often charg'd with such unreasonable *Severity*, by Men that care not to perform their Duty, is too true to be question'd; and such as love to indulge their vile Affections, and cannot afford to take any pains to be Religious, are frequently heard to say, They serve God as well as they *can*, and they can do no more; and that *such* a Religion as *we* urge Men to, is much too hard for Flesh and Blood: 'Tis a Law fitter for Angels than Men; and tho they *wish* they could observe and do it, and can't but *consent to the Excellency of it in the Inner Man*, yet they find a *Law in their Members warring against the Law of their Minds, and bringing them into Captivity to the Law of Sin*; and so, *the good that they would they do not, and the evil that they would not that they do*. And they take up with this as a *sufficient Excuse*; and because God is infinitely *merciful* and *good*, they think he will accept the Plea of the great *Hardship* of his Commands, and their *Inability* to perform them, instead of Obedience to them. But, (as the Lord in the Parable said to his slothful Unprofitable Servant) Out of their own Mouths will I judge those wretched Persons, that thus mock and abuse God, and deceive their own Souls into Ruin. For, if God be infinitely *good* and *merciful*, then certainly, he will not expect any Thing from Men beyond their *Ability*, nor command their Service and Obedience any farther than they are able to pay it:

And

And consequently, what this *merciful* and *good* God commands by *All* Men to be done without any Exception or Dispensation, and threatens Eternal Misery to such as shall dare wilfully to *disobey* him; this, *Every* Man, no question, is able to perform, through the Divine Grace and Assistance; which, as I have before prov'd, is in sufficient measure given to every Man. And to *deny* this, is, in effect, to charge God with the greatest *Cruelty*, *Oppression*, and *Injustice* that is possible. For what less, is the giving Men such Commands as they are not *able* to *perform*, and withal threatning, and actually *inflicting*, *unconceivable* Torments (for such are those of *Hell*) upon all that shall be found disobedient to the *impracticable* Law? This would be, indeed, to require Brick without Straw, as the *Egyptian* Task-masters did, and then to lay on Stripes for a Failure in the Work; nay, 'twould be infinitely *worse*, because the Punishment for Irreligion, and not improving our Talents, is infinitely *greater*, and shall be inflicted to all *Eternity*.

Since therefore, God knows whereof we are made, and remembers that we are but Dust, and can tell how difficult his Commands will be to us, and how proportionable our *Ability* is to keep and do them, better than we our selves, (for 'tis *he* that hath made us, and gave us our *natural* Powers and Faculties, and the Superadditions of *Grace* and *Aid* from Above;) since he is

infinitely *good*, and will not *overload* his Creatures, nor exact *impossible* Tasks, or such as are *extremely difficult*, and but one degree *below* impossible; since he is likewise infinitely *just*, and will not *damn* Myriads of poor Wretches to all Eternity, for not making an *impossible* Improvement of their Talents; and expects only that they should give a *reasonable* Account, according to what they have received from him: From all this it will follow, Not that therefore a Man shall be excus'd for pleading *Inability*, but, that every Man is *able*, through the never-deficient Grace of that good God to such as heedfully attend to it, to *keep* his holy, just, and good Commands, and make *Improvement* suitable to the Talents he hath receiv'd; and if, for all this, he perish, his Blood will be upon his own Head.

Wherefore, let no Man, for the future, be so Impious, as to charge God with expecting *impossible* Services from his Creatures, or think to palliate his Irreligion by crying out of the extreme *Hardship* of living like a Christian; but let every Man set heartily and sincerely about his Duty, and he will find, that God's *Grace* will be *sufficient* for him to his daily Improvement, and that the Ways of Religion are *ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*

I come now to the *last* Thing to be consider'd in this Parable; which is, That the Condition of the diligent *Improvers* of their Talents will be unspeakably *happy*, but the

Condition

Condition of the *Unprofitable*, beyond Expreſſion *miſerable*; and that, both in *this* World and in the *next*.

Firſt, The Condition of the diligent *Improvers* of their Talent, will be unſpeakably *happy*, both in *this* World and *that* above. In *this* World, a quiet and ſerene Conſcience will be to them a *continual Feaſt*; the Senſe of having perform'd their Duty according to their *Ability*, of having been good Stewards of the Grace of God beſtow'd upon them, and that they can give a *ſincere* Account, though not a *perfect* one, to their great Maſter, when he ſhall come to look into their Behaviour in their Stewardſhip; this, will fill their Breaſts with unſpeakable Satisfaction, their Soul will be *calm*, and their Thoughts at Reſt in Conſcience of their *Fidelity*, their Life not imbitter'd with anxious Fear and Dread of a ſad *After*-Reckoning; but, like that of a faithful Servant who is in his Maſter's Favour, ſteady and eaſie, and moving cheerfully in the Circle of his Duty, and in joyful Expectation of the Reward of his Diligence, when his great Lord ſhall advance him from the State of a *Servant* to that of a *Friend* and Boſom-*Favourite*; nay, of a Coheir with himſelf of the Joys and Felicities of the Eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

And beſides this Serenity and Satisfaction of Mind, and comfortable Proſpect of ſo glorious a Recompenſe of Reward, (which are Bleſſings of the firſt Magnitude, and to which,

which, nothing in *this* World is *comparable*) the *improving* Christian shall have *more Talents* given him, more Grace shower'd down upon his Soul; what the *Slothful* have forfeited, shall be conferr'd upon him, and he shall *abound* still *more and more* in every good Word and Work. And what Condition can approach nearer to the state of *Heavenly Glory*, than that of a holy Soul thus *plentifully* stor'd with the *divine Grace?* And if *Grace* and *Glory* differ only in *degree*, and the One be but the Completion and Perfection of the other; a Soul so *filled* with Grace as the *improving* Soul will be, must needs live a *Heaven upon Earth*, and have frequent *Antepasts* of *Glory*.

And in that *other* World, when the Glory shall be *reveal'd*, that is prepared for them that love and serve our Lord Jesus in Sincerity; *then* will their Happiness be as *ineffable* as *endless*. It is express'd in this Parable, by *entring into the Joy of our Lord*; that is, partaking of *his* Glories and Felicities in the Presence of the Immortal God.

They shall be conducted (after having given a good Account of their Stewardship) by the Blessed Angels, into the Presence of the great King of Heaven, where they shall *see him face to face*; and with *wondring* Eyes and *enravish'd* Hearts, behold his *Glory*, gaze upon his Splendors, and nearly view *his* Beauty, who is the *Fountain of Perfection*. *He*, who is *Light it self*, and in whom is *no Darkness at all*, will *hide* nothing of his

his Glory from the Eyes of their *pure* and *prepar'd* Minds; but communicate the Knowledge of his most Excellent Nature, to the utmost *Capacity* of their Beatified Souls, and make 'em *full* of Divine Gladness, with the Joy of his *Countenance*. Their *Apprehensions* shall be *clear'd* and *brightned*, their *Faculties* act upon this best of Objects *vigorously*, and without any Hindrance or *Distraction*; and every View of the Divine Beauty shall discover *new* Graces and Perfections (for God is an Immense and Fathomless *Ocean* of Beauty, as *Plato* excellently expresses it) and their Capacities by every such View shall be *enlarg'd*, and made still more and more *capacious*, for the Reception of a following *greater* Manifestation. And so, their *Love* and *Admiration* of this Divine Being always *increasing*, and their Enjoyment of him compleat and full, to the utmost of their Capacity, their Joy and Happiness will be, like that of *God himself*; because springing from the *same Fountain*, *Unspeakable* and *Eternal*.

And since the Reward of a *Pious Industry*, will be such *an Exceeding and Eternal* Weight of Glory; methinks we should take off our Affections from these *lower* Goods, and doat no longer upon these vain and worthless *Trifles*, nor throw away our Love upon that which *satisfieth* not, *and spend our Labour for that which is not Bread*; but make it our great Endeavour to be *rich towards God*, and by improving the Talents

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which, nothing in *this* World is *comparable*) the *improving* Chriſtian ſhall have *more Talents* given him, more Grace ſhower'd down upon his Soul; what the *Slothful* have forfeited, ſhall be conferr'd upon him, and he ſhall *abound* ſtill *more and more* in every good Word and Work. And what Condition can approach nearer to the ſtate of *Heavenly Glory*, than that of a holy Soul thus *plentifully* ſtor'd with the *divine Grace?* And if *Grace* and *Glory* differ only in *degree*, and the One be but the Completion and Perfection of the other; a Soul ſo *filled* with Grace as the *improving* Soul will be, muſt needs live a *Heaven upon Earth*, and have frequent *Antepaſts* of *Glory*.

And in that *other* World, when the Glory ſhall be *reveal'd*, that is prepared for them that love and ſerve our Lord Jeſus in Sincerity; *then* will their Happineſs be as *ineffable* as *endleſs*. It is expreſs'd in this Parable, by *entring into the Joy of our Lord*; that is, partaking of *his* Glories and Felicities in the Preſence of the Immortal God.

They ſhall be conducted (after having given a good Account of their Stewardſhip) by the Bleſſed Angels, into the Preſence of the great King of Heaven, where they ſhall *ſee him face to face*; and with *wondring* Eyes and *enraviſh'd* Hearts, behold his *Glory*, gaze upon his Splendors, and nearly view *his* Beauty, who is the *Fountain of Perfection*. *He*, who is *Light it ſelf*, and in whom is *no Darkneſs at all*, will *hide* nothing of his

his Glory from the Eyes of their *pure* and *prepar'd* Minds; but communicate the Knowledge of his moſt Excellent Nature, to the utmoſt *Capacity* of their Beatified Souls, and make 'em *full* of Divine Gladneſs, with the Joy of his *Countenance*. Their *Apprehenſions* ſhall be *clear'd* and *brightned*, their *Faculties* act upon this beſt of Objects *vigorouſly*, and without any Hindrance or *Diſtraction*; and every View of the Divine Beauty ſhall diſcover *new* Graces and Perfections (for God is an Immenſe and Fathomleſs *Ocean* of Beauty, as *Plato* excellently expreſſes it) and their Capacities by every ſuch View ſhall be *enlarg'd*, and made ſtill more and more *capacious*, for the Reception of a following *greater* Manifeſtation. And ſo, their *Love* and *Admiration* of this Divine Being always *increaſing*, and their Enjoyment of him compleat and full, to the utmoſt of their Capacity, their Joy and Happineſs will be, like that of *God himſelf*; becauſe ſpringing from the *ſame Fountain*, *Unſpeakable* and *Eternal*.

And ſince the Reward of a *Pious Induſtry*, will be ſuch *an Exceeding and Eternal* Weight of Glory; methinks we ſhould take off our Affections from theſe *lower* Goods, and doat no longer upon theſe vain and worthleſs *Triſles*, nor throw away our Love upon that which *ſatisfieth* not, *and ſpend our Labour for that which is not Bread*; but make it our great Endeavour to be *rich towards God*, and by improving the Talents he

he hath given us, lay up a *Treasure in Heaven.* Remembring, That *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither can it enter into the Heart of Man, to conceive the things which God hath prepar'd for them that love him.* And certainly, that Diligence is *well* bestowed, which shall be rewarded with a *Crown of Glory, Eternal in the Heavens.*

1 Cor. 2. 9.

But with the *Unprofitable* and *Slothful* Servant it is not so, neither in this World nor in the next. In *this* World, the *Lashes* of a *guilty Conscience* will be unto him a *Continual Torment*; the Sense of his having carelessly neglected his Duty, and not performing, according to his *Ability*, the Just Commands of his great Lord; but being an Unfaithful Steward of the Grace of God bestowed upon him, and that he is far from being able to give in a good Account, when his Lord shall come, expecting the Improvement of his Talent: *This* will fill his Breast with unspeakable Trouble and Perplexity, and imbitter all his Worldly Enjoyments with the Mixture of Anxious Fear, and Dread of a severe *After-Reckoning*; and the terrifying Expectation of his sad Fate that will ensue, will be to him, even like a *Hell upon Earth*; and cruciate his Soul with unspeakable *Pangs and Agonies.* And, which is much worse still, the *Grace* that has so long lain *unimprov'd*, shall at length be taken *from him*; and the Man, as *desperate* and irreclaimable, be given over, and as 'twere *seal'd* up to *Remediless Misery.* And in the

next World, at that great Day, when he ſhall be actually call'd to give Account of his Works, the Dire Sentence of *Depart from me ye Curſed into Everlaſting Fire, prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels*, ſhall ſtrike him through with Horror and Confuſion; and he ſhall be driven into *Outer Darkneſs*, where he ſhall Eternally *bewail* his Miſerable Condition, and *gnaſh his Teeth* in bitter Remorſe for bringing himſelf to that Place of Torment, by ſlothfully neglecting the Improvement of that Divine Grace; with which he might, if he would, have work'd out his Salvation. Crying out to Eternal Ages in utter Deſpair, and moſt tormenting Agonies of Soul, *O that I had conſider'd in that my Day, the things that did belong unto my Peace; but now, they are for ever hid from mine Eyes!*

And now, for a Concluſion of this Diſcourſe. Here is in this Parable we ſee, on the one Hand, all the *Encouragement* in the World to Diligence and *Induſtry*, and a Lively Improving Piety; ſuch as more and more Abundance of Grace, with all the Bleſſed Attendants of it in *this* World, and a full Enjoyment of God himſelf in *Heaven*. And on the other ſide, here is, what if duly conſider'd, will make any Man afraid of Spiritual *Sloth* and Idleneſs, and not dare to neglect the *Improvement* of his Talent; for if he does, he ſhall be depriv'd of God's Grace here, and doom'd to Eternal Miſery at the Day of Judgment. Wherefore, let

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us seriously consider what has been now commented upon this Parable; and beg of God so to bless it to our Good, that we may be inclin'd by it to make a due Improvement of the Talents he has committed to our Management, to his *Honour* and *Glory*, and our own *Eternal Salvation*.

The PRAYER.

MOST Glorious God, the Fountain of Perfection, whom I humbly acknowledge to be the Giver of every good and perfect Gift; I beseech thee assist me with thy Grace, that according to thy Just Expectation, I may make a suitable Improvement of the Talents I have receiv'd from thy Bounty, to thy Glory and the Publick Good. And may my Industry be excited by this great Consideration, That thou wilt certainly call me to give an Account of my Improvement, and very speedily perhaps; and wilt proportionably reward or punish me in the Eternal World. I thankfully own, most merciful Father, that thou hast given me sufficient Grace wherewith to arrive at the End of my Hopes, and art not at all wanting to me in this unspeakable Gift; O may I not be wanting to my self, and neglect and bury this Precious Talent, but with Diligence and Carefulness endeavour to work out my Salvation with it in Fear and Trembling: Remembring what

Confusion

Confuſion I ſhall be in, how utterly without Plea or Excuſe, when for my Wicked Slothfulneſs thou ſhalt conſign me to outer Darkneſs, ſince thou didſt enable me to perform all thou expectedſt from me And may the unſpeakably Happy Condition of the Diligent, encourage me to an Active Perſevering Piety, and always to abound in the Work of thee, my Lord; ſince I know my Labour ſhall not be in vain; but be rewarded with ſtill larger Additions of thy Grace in this World, and with the Participation, in great Degrees, of thy Glory in the next. O God, aſſiſt me more and more with this thy Heavenly Grace, and may I always gratefully acknowledge from whom I have receiv'd it, and return thee all the Praiſe of what I ſhall do well by thy Aſſiſtance, and always fear, leſt by my Negligence I forfeit it: That ſo, faithfully improving the Talent thou haſt here committed to my Truſt, I may, at the great Day of Retribution hear theſe Bleſſed Words, *Well done good and faithful Servant, enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord.* Which grant, O Gracious God for the Sake of Jeſus, thy Beloved. *Amen.*

PARABLE

PARABLE IX.

Of the Covetous Rich Fool.

Luke xii. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21.

And Jesus spake a Parable unto them, saying, The Ground of a certain Rich Man brought forth plentifully.

And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do because I have no Room where to bestow my Fruits?

And he said this will I do; I will pull down my Barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my Fruits and my Goods.

And I will say to my Soul, Soul, thou hast much Goods laid up for many Years; take thine Ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

But

But God ſaid unto him, Thou Fool, this Night ſhall thy Soul be required of thee, then whoſe ſhall thoſe things be which thou haſt provided?

So is he that layeth up Treaſure for himſelf, and is not Rich towards God.

THIS Parable was ſpoken upon Occaſion of one of our Lord's Followers, deſiring him to Arbitrate between him and his Brother, in a Difference about dividing their Patrimony; for ſo Verſe 13. of this Chapter, *one of the Company ſaid unto him, Maſter, ſpeak unto my Brother, that he divide the Inheritance with me.* To this our Lord anſwer'd in the 14. Verſe, *Man, who made me a Judge or a Divider over you?* And takes Occaſion from that Requeſt to him, rather to adviſe thoſe that were with him, and all that ſhould hereafter be his Diſciples, to *take Heed and beware of Covetouſneſs*, and that becauſe a *Man's Life* or Happineſs *conſiſteth not in the Abundance of the Things which he poſſeſſeth*; as 'tis in the 15. Verſe. And to make this his Excellent Advice ſink deeper into their Minds, he ſpake the Parable I am now to diſcourſe upon.

The Deſign of it, as we ſee from the Context, is to draw Men off from *Covetouſneſs*, or a too eager Deſire of heaping up Riches; and to expoſe the great *Folly* of being wholly intent upon laying up Treaſures in *this*

Life, and taking little or no Care to be *rich towards God.* For, as that Rich Man in the Parable, whom God had bleſſed with an *extraordinary* Increaſe of the Fruits of the Earth, even to more than his Barns could hold, did entertain Covetous Thoughts of building new ones to hoard it up in, and promis'd himſelf much Happineſs from that Abundance, *Take thine Eaſe, eat, drink, and be merry, for thou haſt Goods laid up for many Years*: As this Covetous Rich Man was ſurpriz'd with a ſudden Summons into the other World, and ſnatch'd away from the midſt of this Abundance, and upbraided with *Folly*, in truſting in ſuch *uncertain* Riches; ſo, and for the very ſame Reaſons, is every Covetous Rich Man an Egregious *Fool*, that *confides* in *Wealth*, and *neglects Religion.*

In my Diſcourſe, therefore, upon this Parable, I ſhall do theſe Four things.

Firſt, I ſhall give a ſhort *Deſcription* of the Vice of *Covetouſneſs*;

Secondly, Endeavour to *expoſe*, both the great *Folly* and *Vileneſs* of this Vice; together with all the Ill Conſequences that attend it;

Thirdly, I will anſwer the Rich Fool's Queſtion which he propos'd to himſelf upon the great Increaſe he had, *What ſhall I do, becauſe I have no Room where to lay my Fruits?* And,

Fourthly, Shew the great *Wiſdom* of not ſetting our *Hearts* upon, nor *eagerly* purſuing Wealth,

Wealth, and of bestowing it as Religion does direct, should it please God in an extraordinary Manner to bless us with it.

And after all, I will urge this upon Men's *Practice*, and so conclude this Argument.

First, I am to give a short *Description* of the Vice of *Covetousness*, that we may know what it is that this Parable would incline us to *avoid*.

The *Covetousness* this Parable warns against (for there are several Sorts of it) is an *Immoderate* Desire of *heaping* up Riches, or of having still *more and more* Wealth, after we have sufficient for the *Comfortable* Support of our selves and Relatives; that we may for the Future, live in greater *Ease* and *Luxury*.

First, This Covetousness is an *Immoderate* Desire of Riches; for *all* Desire of Riches is not Criminal, and a Man may very lawfully *desire*, and as lawfully, by all due Means, endeavour to procure *so much* Wealth as is needful for his own and his *Families* Comfortable Maintenance, and will enable him to be kind to the Poor. But, to desire even *this* with *Impatience*, and over-great *Solicitude*, is the Sin of Covetousness; and the Sin is very much *aggravated* when a Man greedily desires still *on*, when his Comfortable Subsistence, and sufficient Provision for his Family is already provided for.

Again, *immoderately* to desire to heap up Riches is *Covetousness*, though we may intend afterwards to *enjoy* them, to *eat, and*

drink, and be merry, and take our *Eaſe* the more, as the Rich Man in the Parable purpos'd to do; for this diſtinguiſhes *Covetouſneſs* from extreme *Parſimony* and *Niggardlineſs*. They *agree* indeed in this, that they are both an *extreme Deſire of Riches*, but they *differ* likewiſe in *this*, that the *Covetous* may eagerly deſire to *get* Riches with a Deſign afterwards as prodigally to *ſpend* them, but the *Niggard* hoards up what he has got, and endeavours to ſcrape more to it with a Purpoſe not to make uſe of it *himſelf*, nor to let any body *elſe* touch it, as long as he can help it. And theſe, though they are *both* very *great Vices*, yet *Niggardlineſs* is, I think, by much the greater of the Two. But 'tis the extreme Deſire of heaping up Riches, tho' with a Purpoſe to *enjoy* them, that is the Vice this Parable is levell'd againſt; for the Rich Man *there* intended to inlarge his Barns, and lay up his Increaſe in them, *that he might take his eaſe, and eat, and drink, and be merry*; which is a *Kind* of *Covetouſneſs*, that though very *many* are *guilty* of, yet few think it deſerves to be call'd by that hateful Name.

There is one thing more to be explain'd in this Deſcription of Covetouſneſs, namely, What is meant by ſuch a Proportion of Riches as is ſufficient for the *Comfortable* Subſiſtence of a Man and his Relatives? And the Anſwer to this muſt be in *General*; (for to *Particularize* in this Caſe would be endleſs) *that* is ſufficient for the Comfortable

ble Subsistence of every Man and his Family, which will secure them, according to their *Station* and *Degree*, from *Want*; and provide Plenty of what is necessary to *Life*, and *health*, and *decency*, though it does not arise to the *Pomps* and *Vanities* of the World: For he that hath *this*, has, no question, what is sufficient for a very comfortable Subsistence to any *Reasonable* Man. And he that is not satisfied with *such* a Degree of Wealth as *this*, will never be satisfied with *any*, be it never so *great*.

He therefore, that at *all* desires Riches *impatiently*, much more, he, that when he has a Reasonable *Sufficiency* of Wealth, covets still *more*, that he may *ingross* it to *himself*, and the more indulge his *Luxury*, to the Neglect of better things, and builds his Hopes of *Happiness* upon such a Multitude of Riches; is guilty of the *Covetousness* this Parable was spoken against: And the *Folly* and *Vileness* of which Vice, I am in the *Second* Place to expose, and shew what very *Ill* Consequences do attend it.

And *first*, All *Immoderate Desire* of Riches, upon what Account soever, is a very great *Folly*. *Immoderately* to desire *any* thing is questionless a *Folly*; for *all Immoderation* is foolish and *unreasonable*, as must be acknowledg'd by every Man at first sight: And immoderate *Desire* is a kind of *Rack* and *Torture* to the Mind, which for a Man in *any* Case to bring upon *himself*, is certainly a *Folly*, and therefore in *General*, it must be allow'd to be a great Piece of *Folly*, *immoderately to desire*

Riches. But more *Particularly* it is ſo upon the following Accounts.

Firſt, Becauſe 'tis ſo very *uncertain*, whether a Man ſhall *attain* his Deſire, or no. There are ſo many *croſs* Accidents incident to the *Purſuit* of Riches, let Men take what Courſe they will, that 'tis generally the moſt *precarious* thing in the World. If a Man croſſes the *Seas* for Wealth, as *uncertain* as the *Winds* and *Waters* are, as *numerous* as the *Rocks* and *Quick-ſands*, and *Sea-Robbers*; ſo great is the *Uncertainty*, whether *that* way he ſhall *have* what he *deſires*, and *heap up Wealth*, or no. If, for more *Security* he ſtays at *Home*, and by *Domeſtick* Employments endeavours to be *rich*; whatever his Employment is, he is not ſure he ſhall have *Health* to purſue it; or if he *has*, that his Endeavours will be *ſucceſsful*; Ten Thouſand unforeſeen Accidents may deſtroy a very *hopeful* Beginning, and one *Month* may ſet him further *back* than he has *advanc'd* in *Twenty Years*; and *one* unlucky Hit may reduce him to *Poverty*, after he has arriv'd *almoſt* to the *Completion* of his Deſires. In *other* Caſes, there are ſome *certain Means* that ſeldom *fail* of their reſpective Ends; as *Learning*, where there is an *Aptitude* for it in *Nature*, may certainly be acquired by Ingenuous Education, Diligent Study, and Good Converſation; and when there is a Natural *Genius* likewiſe, Men ſeldom fail by Good Inſtruction and *Induſtrious Practice*, of becoming Artiſts in their ſeveral Profeſſions.

ſions. But *Riches* do ebb and flow *unaccountably*; ſometimes the greateſt *Induſtry fails* of them, and they fall *unexpectedly* upon the *Idle* and the Negligent; and as often, when Men think they are within their *Reach*, they make themſelves Wings and fly away they know not how. As, when a Child would catch a *Graſs-hopper*, its Motions are ſo very *irregular*, that he finds it a very difficult Matter at all to come *near* it; and when at length, after much Pains, he thinks he has gain'd his Prize, and eagerly puts forth his Hand to ſeize it, the nimble Inſect leaps to a further Diſtance from him than before. And even juſt ſo (how ruſtick ſoever the Compariſon may be) is it very often with Men that *immoderately* deſire, and *eagerly purſue* Riches; there's no *regular* Way of proceeding that a Man may ſecurely *depend* upon in the Caſe; The Ebbs and Flows of *Wealth* are as various and unaccountable as the Motions of that little *Inſect*, 'tis as hard a matter to come within *reach* of them, and men are as often baulk'd when they think they have them in their Poſſeſſion. And this can't but have been the *Obſervation* of *every* Man, that has liv'd any while in the World, and taken Notice of the Proceedings in it; and has been the coſtly *Experience* of very *many*. Now, for a Man *immoderately* to *deſire*, and *impatiently* to purſue, what there is no ſure and *ſteady* Way of *attaining*; and when, for any thing he can tell, after all his Pains, and the Uneaſineſs conſequent upon his eager

Deſire, he ſhall *miſs* of his *End*; nay, when 'tis a Thouſand to One but he *ſhall* miſs of it (for of a *Thouſand* that immoderately *deſire* great Riches, there is, modeſtly ſpeaking, ſcarce *One* that attains them) for a Man to ſuffer the Torment of an *immoderate Deſire* of what there is ſo little Probability of *attaining*; is certainly a great Piece of *Weakneſs* and *Folly*; and *almoſt* as bad, as if a Man ſhould endeavour eagerly all his Days to encloſe the *Wind* in his *Fiſt*.

And this Compariſon, as *extravagant* as it may ſeem, is countenanc'd by the *wiſeſt* of Men; who, in the 5th. Chapter of *Eccleſiaſtes*, 16th. Verſe, after he had, for Five or Six Verſes before, expos'd the *Folly* of an immoderate Deſire of Wealth; asks this Queſtion, *What Profit hath he that hath labour'd for the Wind? All his Days* (as 'tis Verſe 17.) *he eateth in Darkneſs*, or Uncertainty of the Event, and *hath much Sorrow, and Wrath with his Sickneſs*; *i. e.* as 'tis expreſs'd elſewhere by the ſame wiſe Preacher, *the deferring of his Hope maketh his Heart ſick*, and much is his Trouble and Vexation in purſuing what is *Vanity of Vanities*. And therefore with great Reaſon does St. *Paul* warn Men, not to truſt in *uncertain Riches*, or the *Uncertainty* of Riches, which a Man is as uncertain of *getting*, as of *keeping* when he hath them. And to reaſſume the former Compariſon, as *the Wind bloweth where it liſteth*, and *we hear the Sound of it, but cannot tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth*; ſo *unaccountable* are the

1 Tim. 6. 17.

A more improper Comparison.

the Motions of *Wealth:* For all any Endeavours of ours, Wealth will take its own courſe and change maſters or *ſervants* rather as it liſteth; and though there is a great deal of *Noiſe* made with it and about it, yet no Man can certainly ſay *whence* it *cometh*, by what Methods he may be ſure to procure it, nor *whither* it *goeth*, by what Means 'tis loſt by one, and paſſeth another.

And this is the *firſt* Reaſon why an *immoderate* Deſire of *Riches* is a great *Folly*, becauſe 'tis ſo ſtrangely *uncertain* whether a Man ſhall have that Deſire of his *gratified* or no, nay, a Thouſand to One that he ſhall *not*. A *moderate* Portion of this World's Good may be moderately deſir'd by a wiſe Man, becauſe there is no great Fear of his being *diſappointed*, and Induſtry is generally rewarded with a *Comfortable* Subſiſtence: but impatiently to thirſt after *great* Riches, is an Egregious *Folly*, becauſe 'tis great Odds, but 'twill be to *no Purpoſe*.

But *ſecondly*, ſhould it be to *ſome Purpoſe* thus eagerly to deſire and endeavour after great Riches, and the Man *gains* what he would have; yet, after all, the Purchaſe is not *great*, nor will it countervail the Uneaſineſs the whole Man endures in the *immoderate Deſire* and earneſt Purſuit of it. What *toilſom* Days and *reſtleſs* Nights, what Servitude and *Drudgery* do thoſe go through who reſolve, if poſſible, to raiſe large Eſtates, and greater Families? How many *low* pitiful things are they fain to truckle to, nay, what

what is worſe, how much *cheating* and underhand dealing, how much *Violence* and *Oppreſſion* is there committed by thoſe that make *haſte* to be rich? What *Diſcontents* and *repining* at (as they think) their *ſlow* Progreſs, how does every Rub and *Hindrance* go to their very Heart, and their frequent Baulks and *Diſappointments*, pierce them thorough with *more* and more *pungent* Sorrows, than all their Wealth, though they have Hearts to enjoy it, will ever make amends for?

If abundance of Gold and Silver would certainly make a Man *wiſer* and *better*, if 'twould *clear* his *Apprehenſion*, or *ſtrengthen* his *Memory*, or improve his *Reaſoning*; if 'twould make him more prudent and *diſcreet* and of a *riper Judgment*; if 'twould increaſe *Piety* and *Religion*, and promote a *Godlike* Frame of Spirit; nay, if 'twould but ſo much as refine a Man's *Temper*, and make him of more ſweet and *obliging Behaviour*, or *regulate* the *Paſſions* and Affections of the Soul, and help him to Tranquility of Mind, and cure *Anger*, and *Pride*, and *Envy*, and *Luſt*, and *Revenge*, or the like; if abundance of Riches would work any of *theſe good Effects*, 'twould be worth while earneſtly to deſire them, and induſtriouſly to endeavour to procure them: But, when 'tis ſo *far* from *this*, that the direct *contrary* is general obſervable in thoſe that have greateſt Riches in Poſſeſſion; it muſt, I think, be allow'd to be a very great Piece of *Folly*, for a Man to

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endure ſo *much* for what, when he has it, will not *countervail.*

But, though greedy *Worldlings* may own, that great Riches have little or no Influence upon the Happineſs and Improvement of the *Inner Man*; yet, becauſe a Man has a *Body* as well as a *Soul* to take care of, they are thus greatly deſirous of much Wealth, becauſe 'twill help them to the Enjoyment of much of *this* World's Happineſs, and acquire what will highly pleaſe and gratifie the *Body*; as the Rich Man in the Parable ſaid, they may take their *eaſe, eat, drink, and be merry*, when they have *much Goods laid up for many Years.* I ſhall therefore in the

Second Place ſhew, the *folly* of expecting even *this* World's Happineſs from Abundance of Riches.

For beſides, that the Appetites of the Body are generally obſerved to be more ſickly and *deprav'd* in *rich* than *poorer* Perſons; their *Sleep*, worſe rather than better than other Mens; *the Abundance of the Rich will not ſuffer him to ſleep*, ſays *Solomon*, *but the Sleep of the Labouring Man is ſweet, eat he little or eat he much*; and that *Health* is much more a Stranger to the *Rich* than to the *Meaner* ſort, and the Pleaſures of having a Body Vigorous and Active, without the Encumbrance of Weakneſs and Diſeaſes, almoſt engroſs'd by the Labouring Poor; Beſides this, (which yet alone is enough to prove, that 'tis a *folly* to expect even this World's Eccl. 5. 12.

World's Happineſs from Abundance of Riches, for without *Health*, which Luxury deſtroys the moſt of any thing, there is no Taſte or Reliſh in any other of its Enjoyments;) there is this One Reaſon more, among others, that will farther, and I think *evidently* prove, that 'tis a very great Folly to expect to be *happier* even in *this* World, by growing Richer; and it is this, That Riches are of all Things the moſt *unſatisfying*, and the moſt *perplexing*.

Other Good Things of this World do in ſome ſort *ſatisfie*; and Men are often *cloy'd* with *Pleaſures*, have enough of Mirth and Jollity, of Recreations and Diverſions, and the like; and the Mind is, for a *while*, eas'd and refreſh'd by them: But as for *Riches*, as they *increaſe*, the Deſire of ſtill *more*, *increaſes* proportionably, nay, rather *diſproportionably* with them; and 'twas never yet known, that a *worldly-minded* Man ever thought he had *enough*, but that his Appetite grew *keener* after Wealth, the more 'twas fed with it: And 'tis not unuſual, to hear the greateſt Complaints, Murmurings, and Repinings from the *richeſt* Men. And as for the *Perplexity* that attends *Abundance* of Wealth, that likewiſe is as evident to common Obſervation. The more a Man *hath*, the more Care he muſt take to *preſerve* it, the more Quarrels and Law-Suits will he be embroil'd in; and when there are Troubles and Commotions in the State, and Times grow dangerous and uncertain, then

then are the greateſt *Worldlings* fulleſt of Fears and dreadful Apprehenſions; and not only *real*, but *imaginary* Dangers, terrifie their Unman'd Souls; Things always appearing with the worſt Aſpect to *their* troubled Fancies, who have made *Gold* their *Deity*, and ty'd up their Happineſs in their *Bags*. And nothing, certainly, can be more *perplexing* to a Man's Mind, than ſuch great Fears of *loſing That*, in the *poſſeſſion* of which his *whole Happineſs* is *concentred*.

And accordingly, *Solomon*, who had great Poſſeſſions, above All that were before him, and gather'd him Silver and Gold in ſuch Abundance, that Silver was in *Jeruſalem* common as the Stones in the Street; after all, ſays he, *Eccleſ.* 5. 10, 11. *He that loveth Silver ſhall not be ſatisfied with Silver, nor he that loveth Abundance with Increaſe. And what Good is there to the Owners thereof, ſaving the beholding of it with their Eyes?* And even the *Eye is not ſatisfied with ſeeing* neither. And St. *Paul* ſays very plainly, That the *Love of Money is the Root of all Evil*, and they that *will be Rich, fall into Temptation and a Snare, and pierce themſelves through with divers Sorrows*; and that *Contentment*, with only *Food and Raiment*, is a far greater Happineſs. And therefore, good Reaſon had the Wiſeſt King to ſay, after all his Increaſe, and the Abundance he had *amaſs'd* together, that it was, not only *Vanity*, but *Vexation of Spirit*, Eccleſ. 2. 11.

1 Kings 10. 27.

1 Tim. 6. 9, 10.

Now

Now, that which can never *satisfie*, and as it *increases*, increases a Man's Trouble and Perplexity (which is true, we see, of Riches) is, no doubt, far from conducing to a Man's *Happiness* in *this World*; and therefore, 'tis a very great *Folly*, for any Man to depend upon Abundance of *Wealth* for *Happiness*, for 'tis rather, the Cause of much *Trouble* and *Disquietude*. Or however, God may suddenly deprive a rich *Worldling* of all he has by *Death*, and say, as in the Parable, *Thou Fool, this Night shall thy Soul be required of thee, then whose shall those Things be which thou hast provided?* For, *As we brought nothing into the World, so 'tis certain we can carry nothing out.* And thus much for the *Folly* of Immoderate Desire of *Riches*, in Expectation of a *Happy Life* from *Abundance*. I proceed now to shew,

The *Vileness* of this sort of Covetousness, and of placing the Happiness of Life in great store of Wealth.

That 'tis a very *vile* Thing for a Man immoderately to covet *Riches*, and place the *Happiness* of his *Life* in *Abundance* of them, will be very evident, if we briefly consider what a Man is, and what *Abundance of Wealth* is, and what little or no *proportion* the *one* bears to the *Dignity* of the *other*. A Man is a Creature endow'd with a *Rational* and *Immortal* Soul, capable of Knowing, Admiring, Loving, and Enjoying *God*, who is the *Supreme Good* and the *Centre* of Felicity. As a *Christian*, he is

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an adopted Son of God, Coheir with Chriſt of a Crown of *Glory* in the Eternal Kingdom of Heaven, and deſign'd to participate of thoſe Rivers of divine Pleaſures that are at God's Right-hand for ever and ever. As for *Riches* (or Abundance of Gold and Silver, in which now-a-days we eſteem Riches chiefly to conſiſt) they are *really* no better than Heaps of *Earth* of different *Colours*, impreſs'd with different *Stamps*, and made of different *Sizes*, and to which Men have given a different *Value* and Eſteem, according to their different *Colour*, *Size*, and *Impreſſion*; and which in themſelves, are good for little but to be *look'd on*, and which he that would *live* muſt part with when he has them, in Exchange for other Things that are neceſſary for his *Subſiſtence*.

Now, what can be more *vile* and *baſe*, than for ſo *Noble* and Excellent a Creature as Man, ſo far to *degrade* himſelf, as to employ his greateſt *Love*, and *Admiration*, and *Deſire*, upon a Piece of *Earth*, which was originally made for him to *tread* upon, and produce Things for his Food and Pleaſure! To make that his *Maſter*, nay his *God*, which was *made* to be his *Servant!* For a *Rational Soul* to doat upon a ſenſleſs *Clod*, to neglect the Contemplation of the Excellencies of his *infinitely perfect Maker*, and admire one of the *loweſt* of his *Creatures*; to deſire a Piece of *Earth* with the greateſt *Application*, and have *no Value* for the Immortal

mortal *Glories* of *Heaven*; to place his *Happineſs* in what is ſo very much *inferiour* to him, and upon that which is *indeed* his *Happineſs* to beſtow no *Thoughts*; what can be more *vile* and abject than this! what more unbecoming the Dignity of the Rational Nature, and of a Creature that has ſuch *glorious Hopes!* Where is the *Reaſon* of a Man, that lays out all his Endeavours to acquire a *Trifle*, and in the mean time *diſregards* that which is his *chief good?* and where is the *Religion* of a *Chriſtian*, that has been *redeem'd*, not by *Corruptible Things*, *ſuch as Silver and Gold*, *but with the precious Blood of Chriſt*, *as of a Lamb without Blemiſh and without Spot*; where is *his* Religion, that notwithſtanding this, makes *Silver* and *Gold* the chief Object of his *Affections*, and *treads under foot the Son of God*, *and counts the Blood of the Covenant*, *wherewith he was ſanctified*, *an unholy*, or common, *Thing*, *and does deſpight to the Spirit of Grace*, and loves and admires *Mammon* more than his *Saviour?* What more *vile* and *brutiſh* than this, what more ſtupidly *ungrateful!* This is, to come down to a Level with the *Beaſts that periſh*; nay, 'tis to ſink much *lower*; for *They* act according to their *Natural Inſtincts*, and chooſe as they are *directed* by their Great *Creator*, and ſerve him obediently in that Rank of Being in which he has plac'd them: But *that Man*, much more *that Chriſtian*, that makes *periſhing Riches* the main Object of his Deſires

sires and Endeavours, acts directly *contrary* to the *Reason* that God has given him, *degenerates* many degrees below the Dignity of his Nature, disobeys the Orders of his *Creator*, slights the Heavenly Counsel of his *Saviour*, despises the Glories and Felicities of the Kingdom of Heaven, and of a *Man* and a *Christian* makes himself a vile *Muckworm*, delighted in nothing *Noble* and Excellent, but groveling upon the Earth, as if *that* were the *Centre* of his Happiness. And what can more *vilifie* and *degrade* a *Reasonable* Soul, made after the *Image* of God, than such base Affections as these? 'Tis certainly a most vile Degeneracy, and renders a Man the most *contemptible* Creature in the Universe, both to *God* and *Angels*, and all *wise* and *good Men*.

And thus much may suffice to expose the *Folly* and *Vileness* of an *immoderate* Desire of *Riches*, as in *them* placing the *Happiness of Life*. I shall now shew

The ill Consequences that attend it; which (besides that great *Perplexity* of Mind they cause, mention'd before) are chiefly these *two*: (1) It mightily hinders a Man's *Progress in Religion*, which is the *one Thing necessary*. (2.) It exposes a Man more than any thing, to the Danger of *Apostacy*, or *falling from the Truth*.

First, An immoderate Love of Riches does mightily hinder a Man's *Progress in Religion*, which is the *one Thing necessary*. We may remember, our Lord, in his In-

terpretation of a Parable (before discours'd of) *Matt.* 13. 22. says, that the *Cares of this World, and the Deceitfulness of Riches*, like *Thorns* that spring up with Seed, *choke the Word of God*, and render it *unfruitful*; and in another Parable of a great Supper made at the *Marriage of a King's Son*, by which (as was discours'd upon that Parable) is represented the glad Tidings and Invitations of the Gospel; he tells us, That *that* which *detain'd* Men from it, was likewise the *Cares of the World* and the *Love of Riches*; they had Ground to look after, and Oxen to prove, and therefore they could not come to the Wedding Supper. And accordingly, says our Saviour, in as *express* Words as can be, *Matt. 6. 24. No man can serve two Masters, ye cannot serve God and Mammon.*

Matt. 22. Luk. 14. 18

Now the *Reason* of this is twofold: For *first*, Nothing so much *distracts* a Man's *Thoughts*, as an eager Desire and Pursuit of *Wealth*; for Riches are so difficult to be *acquir'd* (as has been said) and so very *slippery* when gain'd; that, as to *get* them will exercise all a Man's *Contrivance*, employ all his Thoughts and *Attention*, and consume his whole *Time*; so to *keep* them when once gotten, will, to a Man that knows the *Hardship* of getting them, and how *soon* they are *lost* again, engage him in constant Care and Solicitude to *watch* his Idol, lest he be *deprived* of it; and so, his Mind becomes distracted with continual Apprehensions of

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Danger, and at leisure for no other Thoughts than how to *secure* his *Riches*. And this, those that are acquainted with Men much wedded to the World, may soon perceive by their careful anxious Looks, and distrustful Timorous Discourse. Now, the immoderate Love of Riches thus *engrossing* a Man's Soul; and the great Business of *Religion*, or making Provision for *Another* World, and laying up a Treasure of good Works in Heaven, being a Thing that likewise requires *Time* and *Diligence*, and a close Application of all our Faculties to the Performance of it; and it being impossible for a Man to attend closely to two Things at once; and the Love of *this* World, and of the *next*, being not only *different*, but *contrary* the one to the other: How can it be, but that he that *eagerly* loves *Riches*, and has his Soul prepossess'd with a strong Desire of *them*, and all his Faculties before engag'd in their Pursuit; must move very *slowly* in the Way of Religion, if he moves *at all*; nay indeed, rather move *backward* than *forward*; and the *more* he loves the *World*, grow colder still in his Affections to *God*.

Another Reason of this is, Because an Immoderate Love of Money is a kind of *Fascination* and Enchantment; it casts a *Mist* before a Man's Understanding, and makes him less sensible and *apprehensive* of the great Obligation to a Religious Life, and so dulls and stupifies the Soul, that it be-

comes very little moved with the Sermons of the Gospel. What else should be the Reason of that strange *Unconcernedness* in the Worldly-minded, though press'd never so home with the Necessity of minding Religion more and the World less, of endeavouring, before all Things, to be *rich towards God*, and to give of their Abundance to the Relief of the Poor, and not to trust in *uncertain* Riches, and the like? They give us the Hearing perhaps, and that's All, and go on still in their own Course as earnestly as ever; and if they offer any thing in their Defence, 'tis so strangely *weak* that a Man can't but admire at it. Sometimes we shall hear them say, they don't know *what Streights* they may be reduc'd to yet before they dye, and therefore they think it but Prudence to provide for the worst; forgetting all the while, that our Lord expressly *forbids* all such anxious Solicitude for the Morrow, and commands an humble Trust in the Providence of God, who never forsakes those that are moderately industrious, and depend upon him for a Blessing; and never reflecting upon the *miserable Streight* they will be in at the Day of Judgment, if destitute of good Works, and not able to give a sincere Account of their Stewardship.

Sometimes these Men will quote Scripture, and tell us, the Apostle says, *He that provides not for his own House, is worse than an Infidel*, forgetting in the mean time the

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Words of the same Apostle in another Place, that *the Love of Money is the root of all Evil*; and those of our Saviour immediately before this Parable, *Take heed, beware of Covetousness, for a mans Life consisteth not in the Abundance of the Things which he possesseth.* And in *Matt.* 6. 32. *Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added unto you, for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things*; and that the *Covetous* are in the number of those that shall never see the Kingdom of Heaven. Of all Vices that we reprove and warn Men against, *Covetousness* and *Worldly-mindedness* we find to be most *stubborn* and irreclaimable; and 'tis very seldom indeed, that we can stop a Man that is in a hot pursuit of Wealth; so strangely *bewitching* is this Love of Money, and more than ordinary destructive of a true Sense of Religion in the Soul. And accordingly says our Lord, *How hard is it for a rich man* (one that makes a *God* of Riches, and confides and trusts in them) *to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven! 'tis easier for a Camel to pass through the Eye of a Needle.* 'Tis next door to an Impossibility, and nothing but the Almighty Power of God changing his Heart, can make him capable of that Happiness. And St. *Paul* agreeably, *Not many rich, not many mighty are call'd, and the God of this World hath blinded the Eyes of those that believe not.* And the *Pythagoreans*, by the meer Light of Na-

1 Cor. 6. 10. Eph. 5. 5.

ture, were sensible of this, and taught their Scholars a Separation from the Affairs of the World, if they would Philosophize well, and find out pure Truth, and the Secrets of Wisdom. Wherefore, we see it highly concerns us, to take no *such* Thought for the Morrow, but endeavour to lay up a Treasure in Heaven; because, *Where our Treasure is, there will our Hearts be also.*

Another very sad Consequence of an Immoderate Love of Riches, is, that it exposes a Man, more than any Thing besides, to Apostacy, or falling from the Truth. St. *Paul*, 1 *Tim.* 6. 9. says, *They that will be rich, fall into Temptation and a Snare*; and more expressly in the next Verse, *The Love of Money is the root of all Evil; which, while some have coveted after, they have erred from the Faith*: and the Event has often prov'd this true; and the Hopes of gaining, and the Fear of losing Riches, has prevail'd with Thousands to turn *Apostates* to the Truth. For the sake of a little Money 'twas, that *Judas* betray'd his Master and Saviour; and to tempt with Money, is a way of proceedure so very successful, an Engine so almost irresistable, that 'tis made use of by all sorts that would gain Proselites to a Party; and the great Tempter, with much Confidence, after his other Stratagems fail'd him, made Offer of *Riches* to our *Lord Himself* (as his best Reserve) when he would perswade him to Fall down and Worship him. And so unreasonable a Love have Worldly-minded

minded Men for Wealth, as to *be* and *do* any Thing at the Frowns or Promises of him who has Power to give or take away Riches. This has been the Experience of all former Ages, and too much of our *own* too, and will still be so, till Men grow so wise as to know how to be content with Food and Raiment, and believe our Lord's Words, that *a man's Life consisteth not in the Abundance of the Things which he possesseth*, and *that Godliness with Contentment, is the greatest gain.* And therefore, as much as it concerns Men to be *constant* in the Profession of the Truth of God, that is, as much as their *Salvation* is worth, so much it concerns them to *take heed and beware of Covetousness.* For 'tis very true, in more Senses than one, that it is *Idolatry.* Colos. 3. 5.

Having thus shewn, the great *Folly* and *Vileness* of an Immoderate Desire of Riches, and of expecting the Happiness even of *this* Life from Abundance of Wealth, and mention'd two very ill *Consequences* of this Covetousness; I proceed now to the

Third Thing I intended to do; which is, to Answer the Rich Fool's Question that he proposed to himself, upon the great Increase he had, *What shall I do because I have no room where to lay my fruits?* And shew, how many *good* Ways there are of Disposing of *Abundance.*

Of all the Ways of bestowing what was *more than his Barns would hold* (by which I suppose is express'd his having more than

was needful to his own comfortable Subsistance? Covetousness would let this Rich Man think of none but of Building *New Barns* wherein to *lay up* his Abundance, and then to *take his Ease, and eat, and drink, and be merry*: He looked no farther than *Himself*; and the more God's Blessings increas'd upon him, the more he purpos'd to live in Luxury and Excess, and *Epicurize* away that which God gave him to a quite different, and much better Purpose.

Quod superat non est melius quo insumere possis?
Cur eget indignis quisquam te divite? quare
Templa Ruunt Antiqua Deum, cur improbe chara
Non aliquid Patriæ tanto emetiris Acervo?
Horat. Serm. Lib. II. Sat. 2.

For, every Man whom God has blessed with *Abundance*, is God's *Steward* of that *Abundance*, and must *bestow* it according to the *Will* of his great *Lord*; for so St. *Peter*, in his first Epistle, *chap.* 4. *ver.* 10. *As every man has receiv'd the Gift, even so minister one to another, as good Stewards of the manifold Grace of God.* Now the Duty of a good Steward is thus represented in the 42d Verse of this 12th of *Luke*, *Who then is that faithful and wise Steward whom his Lord shall make Ruler over his Houshold to give them their portion of Meat in due season?* That is, To give the Family their Portion in due Season, is the Duty of a Faithful

Faithful and Good Steward. Now the Race of Mankind is God's great Family in the World, and ſome of the Members of this his Family he has made Choice of as his *Stewards* and *Purveyors* to provide for the reſt, and has according entruſted them with ſuch a ſhare of his Revenue, to ſome more, to ſome leſs, as in his infinite Wiſdom he has thought moſt fit, and order'd them to expend it to the Advantage of his Houſhold, that every one be provided for according to his Needs, and that no Man be ſuffer'd, as much as in them lies, to be miſerable and periſh: And this he requires ſhould be done *faithfully*, after a moderate Proviſion firſt made for themſelves and Relatives, as they ſhall anſwer it at that great Audit, when every Man muſt give Account of his Stewardſhip.

The Rich Man then in the Goſpel, being (as every other Rich Man is) God's *Steward*, to provide for ſuch as were in Neceſſity and *Want*, according to the *Abundance* God had given him, 'tis an eaſie Matter to anſwer the Queſtion he propos'd to himſelf upon his great Increaſe, *What ſhall I do becauſe I have no room where to lay my fruits?* Why, act like a *good Steward* for thy great Maſter, and let the Houſes of the Poor be the Granaries for the Abundance of thine Increaſe. *Charity* to the *Neceſſitous* is the beſt Way of beſtowing *Abundance*; and as many Ways as there are of expreſſing that Charity (which are innumerable) ſo many

Ways

Ways are there of disposing of what is more than needful for our own comfortable Support. To Feed the Hungry, to give Drink to the Thirsty, Harbour to distressed Strangers, Cloaths to the Naked, Visits of Comfort and Relief to the Sick, and Freedom to Prisoners; to be a Father to the Fatherless, and a Husband to the Widow, and the like; this is to discharge a good Stewardship; this is what every Rich Man ought to do with his Abundance: And Blessed is that good Servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing; *Of a truth*, saith our Lord, *his Master will make him Ruler over all that he hath*; he will commit still more of his Revenue to his Management, bless him with greater Prosperity and Increase, and at last he shall be received into the Joy of his Lord, and Reign with Christ his Great Master, in Glory for ever. Whoever therefore has *Abundance*, needs not much to perplex himself how he shall bestow it, for the *Poor are always with us*; and for the Relief of *their Necessities*, not the Gratifying our own *Luxurious* Desires, must God's *Extraordinary* Blessings be laid out.

Let us now, in the *Fourth* Place, consider the great *Wisdom* of not setting our Hearts upon, nor eagerly pursuing Riches, and disposing of them as Religion directs, if it shall please God in an extraordinary Manner to bless us with them.

If Riches increase, set not your Heart upon them, is excellent Advice of the Royal Psalmist, *Psal.* 62. 10. and very true is that of St. *Paul* to *Timothy*, *Ephes.* 1. 6, 10. that *while some have coveted after Mony, they have err'd from the Faith, and pierc'd themselves through with divers Sorrows*; and that Godliness with Content is great Gain; and therefore, wise indeed is that Man, that knows how to be content with his present Portion, and by setting his Affections upon more noble Objects, escapes the *Snare* of coveting after Wealth. He is free from the most *dangerous* Passion, the Love of Mony being the *root of all Evil*; and is secure of Quiet and Satisfaction amidst all the Turns and Varieties of Fortune, the great Uncertainties of a false and fickle World: If *Poverty* should become his Lot, he is *prepar'd* for't; he knows there is no Stability in this World's Good, and therefore values it accordingly, and remembers that he has a much greater Treasure in a better Place, of which none can deprive him, and which he shall enjoy to *Eternity*, and upon *that* fixes his Affections, and longs for the Happy Time when he shall take *Possession* of it. While he hath a plentiful Fortune, he acts like a good Steward of his great Lord, and enjoys the Comforts of it by letting those share with him that want a Supply, and thanks God that he is so blessed, as to *give* rather than *receive*; and in every respect makes the best use he can of what he has, to the Advancement

vancement of the Glory of his great Patron, and the Good of his Brethren; and then can ſtep ſecurely, though Dangers and Misfortunes threaten, if God thinks fit to *divert* them, and *continue* to him what he has, he knows he can do it; if not, he knows that all will end for the *beſt* at *laſt*, and ſo, chearfully reſigns what God before had lent him: he is ſatisfied that *Happineſs* does not conſiſt in Abundance, and that a good Conſcience is a continual Feaſt, and therefore, his main Endeavour is to preſerve a good Conſcience, a Soul clear and unſpotted, and with *that* coarſe Fare will reliſh well, and a homely Garment ſit eaſie upon him; and ſuch *Neceſſaries* as theſe, he that feeds the Ravens, and cloaths the Lillies, will ſurely provide for him. And he that is *thus* diſpos'd, muſt needs be in perpetual Tranquility and Peace; and very *wiſe* conſequently in taking that Courſe, which helps him to thoſe ineſtimable Bleſſings.

As for the Wiſdom of diſpoſing of abundance (when God thinks fit to bleſs a Man with it) according to the Direction of Religion in the Relief of the Poor and Needy; there needs nothing more to recommend it to Chriſtians, than for them to read the latter Part of *Mat.* 25. where we are informed that the Expreſſes of Men's *Charity* ſhall at the great Day of Judgment be particularly enquir'd into, and the Charitable rewarded infinitely with Glory and Happineſs in Heaven; and the Uncharitable doom'd as accurſed

curſed Perſons to depart from God the Fountain of Bliſs, into Everlaſting Torments, prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels. And, if ſo to direct our Steps in this World, as to avoid the Miſeries of Hell, and arrive at the unſpeakable Happy Kingdom of Heaven, be the greateſt *Wiſdom*, then is it the greateſt Wiſdom, by a Charitable Diſpoſal of Mens Abundance to the Poor, to make Proviſion againſt that great Day of final Retribution, when Charity ſhall be ſo particularly enquired into, and ſo highly rewarded.

There remains nothing now to be done, but to urge what has been ſaid upon Mens Practice. We have ſeen in this Diſcourſe how great *Folly* 'tis eagerly to deſire and purſue *Abundance* of Wealth, that 'tis very uncertain whether ever ſuch Deſire ſhall be *gratified* or no, and that there is no *Satisfaction* in the *greateſt* Riches when *poſſeſs'd*, and that they are often very ſuddenly loſt again, and then the Grief for being *depriv'd* of them will fill the Soul with abundantly greater *Trouble* than the *Enjoyment* of them did with *Pleaſure*; and we have ſeen, as the *Folly*, ſo the *Vileneſs* of Covetouſneſs, how much a Chriſtian is debas'd by thus groveling on the Earth, and placing his Happineſs in what *is* ſo much *beneath* him, and neglecting that which is the only proper Object of his Affections, and is of infinitely greater Value than all the Riches of Ten Thouſand Worlds; we have ſeen likewiſe the *ill Conſequences* of Covetouſneſs,

ouſneſs, what a great *Hindrance* it is to, nay, *Deſtroyer* of Religion, how it indiſpoſes a Man for the Service of God, and endangers, more than any thing, his ſteady Adherence to the Truth; we have been directed to much better Ways of diſpoſing our Abundance when we are bleſſed with it, than either in hoarding it up, or waſting it in Luxury and Exceſs; namely, in relieving the Neceſſities of the Poor, which will intitle us to the Reward of a good and faithful Steward, even the Eternal Joy of our dear Lord; and we have ſeen the great *Wiſdom* of a *contented* Mind, the Bleſſedneſs of not *overvaluing* Riches, and the great Advantage that will be made by the *Charitable* Diſpoſal of them, when Chriſt ſhall come to take Account of Mens Works at the great Day of Recompenſe. Wherefore, to conclude all in the excellent Exhortation of our Lord immediately after my Text; let none of us take Anxious and Perplexing *Thought for our Life, what we ſhall eat; nor for the Body, what we ſhall put on, for the Life is more than Meat, and the Body than Rayment, and* he that gave the Greater, will, no Queſtion, provide the Leſſer. Let us *conſider the Ravens, for they neither ſow nor reap, have neither Store-Houſe nor Barn, and God feedeth them; how much better are we than the Fowls: And which of us by taking thought, can add one Cubit unto his Stature? If we then be not able to do what is leaſt, why take we thought for the reſt?* Let us *conſider the Lillies, how they grow, they*

toil

toil not, they spin not, and yet, Solomon *in all his Glory, was not arrayed like one of these. If then, God so cloath the Grass, which to Day is, and to Morrow is cast into the Oven, how much more will he cloath us,* who very much betray our *little* Faith in doubting it?

Wherefore, let us not immoderately *seek what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, or wherewithall be cloathed, neither be of doubtful,* or anxious and too careful *Mind, for our Father knoweth that we have need of all these things; but seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto us,* in such a Proportion as Infinite *Wisdom* and *Goodness* knows to be *best* for us. Remembring, that as the Covetous Rich Fool in this Parable, that trusted in his Riches, and propos'd to himself much Happiness from a Luxurious Enjoyment of them, was suddenly snatch'd from them to give Account of his Stewardship; *so shall it be with every one that layeth up Treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.*

The PRAYER.

O Eternal God, the great Creator and Governour of all things, and whose Wisdom and Goodness in all the Disposals of thy Providence is Infinite; grant me the Wisdom to be contented with my present Lot, and satisfied with a moderate Proportion of this World's Good, and not to be too careful

careful and solicitous in my Pursuit, even of that. For ever preserve me, I entreat thee, from the great Folly and Sin of Covetousness, and may I be so thoroughly convinced of the Uncertainty of Riches, both in the getting and the keeping, how unsatisfying they are when possess'd, and the many Snares and Temptations that attend them; as always to preserve a great Indifferency to them, and make it my chief Endeavour to attain the real Happiness of a contented Spirit. Grant that I may be more and more sensible how vile a thing it is to place my Felicity in what is so much beneath me as these Perishing Riches are, and which instead of improving me in what is really valuable, tend to betray me into many vile and hurtful Lusts, retard my Progress in Religion which is the one thing necessary, and too often betray into Apostacy from thy Truth. O grant that I may act like a Man, and a Christian, and make it my chief Aim to be rich towards thee my God, and to lay up a Treasure in Heaven; and if through thy Bountiful Goodness, Riches here increase, give me grace, I intreat thee, not to set my Heart upon them, but to dispose of them so as may most conduce to thy Glory, and the Good of the Community; that making Friends with the Mammon of Unrighteousness according to thy Blessed Will, when these fading Riches shall fail, and be left behind me, my Charity may procure for me a Reception into these Everlasting Habitations, where I

shall

ſhall have a glorious Inheritance that fadeth not away; where neither Ruſt nor Moth doth corrupt, and where Thieves break not through and ſteal, and where my Happineſs ſhall be ineffable, fully ſatisfying and Eternal. *Amen.* Bleſſed God, *Amen, Amen.*

Parable X.

Of the Barren Fig-Tree.

Luke xiii. 6, 7, 8, 9.

A certain Man had a Fig-Tree planted in his Vineyard, and came and ſought Fruit thereon, and found none.

Then ſaid he to the Dreſſer of his Vineyard, Behold theſe Three Years, I come ſeeking Fruit on this Fig-Tree, and find none; cut it down, why cumbereth it the Ground?

And he anſwering, ſaid unto him, Lord let it alone this Year alſo, till I ſhall dig about it and dung it:

And if it bear Fruit well: And if not, then after that thou ſhalt cut it down.

THIS Parable was ſpoken upon the News that was brought to our Lord of the ſad Fate of ſome Factious *Galileans*, whom *Pilate* the *Roman* Governour had ſet upon and deſtroy'd, mingling their Blood with the Sacrifices

crifices they were offering. To this, our Lord firſt made this Anſwer; *Suppoſe ye that thoſe* Galileans *were Sinners above all the* Galileans, *becauſe they ſuffered ſuch things? I tell you nay, but except ye repent, ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh. Or thoſe Eighteen, upon whom the Tower in* Siloam *fell and ſlew them* (another ſad Accident that had lately happen'd) *think ye that they were Sinners above all that dwelt in* Jeruſalem? *I tell you nay, but except ye repent, ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh.* And then he added this Parable, that he might further enforce the Neceſſity of a ſpeedy Repentance and Amendment of Life in all Men; in order to their eſcaping the Juſt *Judgment* of God in *this* World, and the *Eternal* Puniſhments of Sin in the *next*.

From what our Lord ſaid to his Diſciples upon the ſad Fate of the *Galileans*, and thoſe ſlain by the Tower in *Siloam*, *think ye that they were Sinners above all*, &c. we may, before we proceed to conſider the Parable, learn this ſhort, but excellent Leſſon; namely, That when ſudden ill Accidents befall our Neighbours, we do not preſently make Concluſion, as is too often done, (eſpecially where there has been any Enmity or Difference between the Parties) that God has met with them by his Judgments for ſome *Extraordinary* Wickedneſs of theirs, and pronounce them *worſe* Men than our ſelves, or others that *eſcape*, becauſe they ſuffer ſuch things; for this is a very *raſh* and uncharitable Sentence, and may be far from *Truth*:

But rather, by God's *Severity* upon others, be inclined to reflect upon our *selves*, and humble our selves before him for our *own* Iniquities; and entirely resolve to forsake every Evil Way, lest *we* likewise fall under the *like* Expresses of his Vengeance in this World, or of infinitely *worse* in that which is to come.

In the Parable it self, is represented God's Method of Proceeding with Sinners now under the Gospel from first to last; and it is this.

First, He plants them in his *Vineyard*, the Church of Christ; that there, by the good Cultivating of the Ministers of his Kingdom, and the refreshing Influences of his Blessed Spirit upon their Souls, they may become Fruitful of such good Works, as may fit and prepare them for the Enjoyments of his Heavenly Kingdom; to which in due season, they are to be *transplanted*. After they are thus plac'd in his *Vineyard*, and Cultivated by the Sermons of the Gospel, he looks for a proportionable Fruitfulness from them; and that after all his Care and Goodness to them, they would for their Part make him a due Return of the Fruits of Evangelical Righteousness: As, when a Tree is remov'd from a Poorer to a Richer Soil, and much Care and Husbandry used about it, 'tis expected it should grow and flourish accordingly, and bring forth more and better Fruit. After God has, with much Patience and Forbearance, yearly

ly ſought for Fruit from them, and is as often diſappointed; his Wiſdom and his Juſtice prompt him to rid his Vineyard of the Incumbrance of thoſe Unprofitable Trees, to remove from the Society of his Faithful Diſciples, thoſe that are a Trouble and a *Scandal* to them; and as Barren Trees are laid aſide to be burnt, ſo to conſign them to thoſe everlaſting Burnings prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels. But, though in Juſtice he purpoſes the Deſtruction of the Unfruitful, yet his infinite Mercy, through the Interceſſion of the Compaſſionate Jeſus (the *Dreſſer* of this his Vineyard, the *Head* and *Governor* of the Chriſtian Church) inclines him to a ſtill farther Forbearance till they ſhall be cultivated and manur'd afreſh, by the again repeated Inſtructions and Exhortations of his Servants the Miniſters of the Goſpel, and the reiterated Motions of the Bleſſed Spirit of Life and Holineſs. And then, if they bear Fruit *well*, Happy will it be for them; but if not, after that he will *cut them down*, and utterly deſtroy them. Of each of theſe Particulars we ſhall now diſcourſe in their Order.

The *firſt* is, God's wondrous Care and Tenderneſs of Sinners in Planting them in his *Vineyard*, as the Parable expreſſes it; that is, receiving them into the Church of Chriſt, where they are cultivated by the Miniſters of his Kingdom, and their Souls water'd with gentle Showers from Above, the bleſſed Influences of the Holy Spirit,

that they may Flouriſh and become Fruitful of ſuch good Works as may prepare them for the Felicities of Heaven, to which in due time they ſhall be Tranſplanted.

Before the Coming of our Saviour, the *Jewiſh* Church was God's Vineyard, his peculiar Incloſure, and the Subject of his more immediate Care and Government; and all but the Seed of *Jacob* were excluded as wild uncultivated Trees, and left to Themſelves in the Wilderneſs of the World; For ſo, in a ſpiritual Senſe, was all but the Land of *Jewry*, the Lot of their Inheritance. Afterwards, when the Fullneſs of Time was come, that God would take Pity upon the whole Race of *Adam*, and receive all Mankind to his Favour; he then *enlarg'd* that his Vineyard, and gave a Free Admittance to all that would ſubmit to the *Culture* and Government of his *Eternal Son*; whom he ſent to break down the former Incloſure, and make it more *capacious*, even as large as the *World it ſelf*, and committed it to his Management, made him the great *Dreſſer* of this Vineyard, the Head and Governour of this *Univerſal* Church; that through his excellent Directions, and the Care and Induſtry of his Servants, and the Decrees from Above of his Divine Grace and Aſſiſtance: And above all, through the wondrous Efficacy of his *Precious Blood*, with which he plentifully enrich'd this his new Plantation, it might thrive and flouriſh, and bring forth Fruit meet for him by whom it was dreſs'd,

even

even the *Fruits of the Spirit*, and ſuch as are *meet for Repentance*, ſuch as may advance the Glory of God by the Salvation of innumerable Souls, that *none* made after his Image might *periſh*, but *all* come to *Everlaſting Life*.

God's Vineyard then being thus *enlarg'd*, and his Church now no longer confin'd to a *Corner* of the World, but by the Coming of Chriſt made *Univerſal*, that *all men might come to the Knowledge of the Truth*; Man is again, as 'twere, ſeated in *Paradiſe*, and reconciled to God: 'Tis again put into his Power to continue in his Makers Favour, and after a Happy Life in this World, to be *tranſplanted* into that Heavenly Country, where is the Reſidence of the Divine Majeſty, and Rivers of ineffable Pleaſures which flow for evermore. As through the *Diſobedience* of the *firſt Adam* Mankind was driven out of Paradiſe, and doom'd to Live and Labour amongſt Briars and Thorns, as under the Diſpleaſure of his Creator, and then to Dye and Return to his Duſt; ſo through the *Obedience* of the *ſecond Adam*, even to the Death of the Croſs, through the Merits of his Blood, and the Atonement of his Sacrifice, all that ſad Sentence and Condemnation is, in a *ſpiritual* Senſe, revers'd, and we are again planted in the Vineyard and Garden of God, recall'd from the Portion of Thorns and Briars, and reſtor'd to the Favour of our Creator, and at length to change this Corruptible for Incorrupti-

ble, this Dishonour and Weakness for Glory and Power, this Natural for a Spiritual Body, this Mortal Life for Immortality; and by this means is brought to pass the
1 Cor. 15. Saying that is written, *Death is swallowed up in Victory.*

O Blessed Alteration! O happy Change of *Misery and Shame* for Happiness and Glory! O the Miraculous Love and Goodness of God to Mankind, in thus commiserating our deplorable Condition, and delivering us from the Power of Darkness, and translating us into the Kingdom of his Dear Son, and making us *meet* to be Partakers of the Inheritance of the Saints in Light! Happy are they who have heard of these Glad Tidings, and are planted in this Spiritual Vineyard, and under the Care and Cultivation of the great Dresser of it *Christ Jesus*, who have such great Helps and Assistances to *bring forth fruit unto Holiness*, and
Heb. 6. 11. consequently such full *Assurance of Hope*, that the *End will be Everlasting Life.*

Let Them give Thanks from the Bottom of their Hearts, whom the Lord hath thus Redeem'd, and deliver'd from the Hand of the Infernal Enemy, and be telling of his Salvation from Day to Day: And let us of these Happy Islands, in the first place, magnifie him for this his Infinite Goodness; for none have had a greater share of it than we, none better Planted nor better Cultivated, than the Members of this Church of *England*; and (which does much advance the

the Bleſſing) none were in a more ſad and *deplorable* Condition than the Inhabitants of theſe Iſlands before the Preaching of the Goſpel. And indeed, what the Prophet *Iſaiah* ſays of God's dealing with the *Jewiſh* Church, which was then his Vineyard, may be very truly ſaid of his gracious Dealing with this our Church, *What could have been done more to his Vineyard that he hath not done in it? He hath planted it in a very fruitful Hill, and fenced it* by his Providence from the Incurſions of its Enemies, *and gather'd out the Stones thereof*, purg'd it from ſcandalous Hereſies and Superſtitions, which are Stones of Stumbling and Rocks of Offence, *and built a Tower in the midſt of it*, guarded it with the Civil Power, making Kings its Nurſing Fathers, and Queens its Nurſing Mothers, *and made a Wine-preſs in it*, furniſh'd it with all Neceſſaries of Holy Inſtruction, and the Service of an Excellent Miniſtry, to inforce the great Truths of Religion, and lay all the Beauties and Excellencies of it before the People. And now, what could have been done more for this Church than the Lord has already done for it? And what an ineſtimable Happineſs is it that we enjoy, who were Born in this Church, early Conſecrated to God in Baptiſm, and thereby planted in this Vineyard, and fed with the ſincere and unmix'd Milk of the Word, plainly and without Reſerve, or the cunning Craftineſs of Men that lye in wait to deceive: We are invited to a Fre- Iſa. 5. 4.

Frequent and *Entire* Reception of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, that great Conveyance of the Divine Grace and Aid, and have as many, and as moving Exhortations to live up to our Holy Profession, as are enjoy'd by any Part of the Christian World. What an inestimable Happiness is this! And what great Reason have we, as to bless God for this his unspeakable Goodness to us, so to bring forth the Fruits of Righteousness in great Abundance? 'Tis but Just and Right that we should do it, and God expects it from *All* that are Planted in his Vineyard, much more from such as have had *extraordinary* Care and Cultivation bestow'd upon them, as we have had. For so, in the

Second Place, we find in this Parable, that the Owner of the Vineyard came to the *Fig-Tree* he had planted in it, expecting Fruit from it.

The Fruit that God expects from Christians that have enjoy'd the Means of Grace and spiritual Improvement, is that which is call'd *Fruit meet for Repentance*, and the *Fruits of the Spirit*. Fruits meet for Repentance, are the Advances to a New and Spiritual Life, such as shall demonstrate a sincere Renovation and Change of Mind, a Turning from a Course of Rebellion against God, and Hatred of him, to entire Obedience to him, and hearty Love. But he that to the Profession of Christianity adds Debauchery of Manners, and instead of bring-

bringing forth the Fruits of the Spirit, ſuch as *Love*, *Joy*, *Peace*, *Long-Suffering*, *Gentleneſs*, *Goodneſs*, *Faith*, *Meekneſs*, *Temperance*, *and ſuch like*; Drudges in the *Works of the Fleſh*, ſuch as *Adultery*, *Fornication*, *Uncleanneſs*, *Laſciviouſneſs*, *Idolatry*, *Witchcraft*, *Hatred*, *Variance*, *Emulations*, *Wrath*, *Striſe*, *Seditions*, *Hereſies*, *Envyings*, *Murthers*, *Drunkenneſs*, and ſuch like; ſuch Men as theſe are, as St. *Jude* expreſſes it, *Trees, whoſe Fruit withereth, without Fruit, twice dead*, or dead a ſecond Time after they were *enliven'd* by the Grace of Chriſt, and planted in his Vineyard, where they might have lived and flouriſh'd and brought forth much Fruit, well-pleaſing unto God; and by this their Barrenneſs, are as 'twere *pluck'd up by the Roots, and to whom is reſerv'd the Blackneſs of Darkneſs for ever, and whoſe End is to be burn'd.* Jude 12.

When our Lord, as he was returning from *Bethany* to *Jeruſalem*, ſaw a Fig-Tree at a Diſtance, very promiſing and full of Leaves, and went to it, expecting to find Fruit upon it; but finding nothing thereon but Leaves only, curs'd it and ſaid unto it, let no Fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever; he plainly enough told the World, that the *Profeſſion* of Chriſtianity muſt always be attended with the Fruits of Piety, that he expects to find it ſo, and will ſeverely puniſh where he finds it otherwiſe. The Leaves of a Fig-Tree are broad and ſtrong, and hang thick, and are of a lovely Colour,

Colour, and therefore very apt to repreſent the Profeſſion of Chriſtianity, which makes the faireſt Appearance of any Religion that was ever taught the World, and the Title of a *Chriſtian* does include all that can be ſuppos'd excellent and good in a Man. But, as the Fig-Tree, beſides flouriſhing Leaves, bears a Delicious *Fruit*, and has always upon it Fruit coming to Maturity; ſo Chriſtianity muſt not be all *Shew* and Profeſſion, but the Fruits of Holineſs muſt appear as well as the Leaves of Fair Speeches, and the outward Performance of ſome of the more Cuſtomary and Publick Duties of it; and, as is obſerv'd in the Fig-Tree, there muſt *always* be ſome Fruit growing to Ripeneſs and Perfection: God expects to find it ſo, and where he is diſappointed, the Fate of the Barren Fig-Tree will be their Portion.

We are all of us too apt with our firſt Parents, to cover our Spiritual Nakedneſs with Fig-leaves, and by tacking together a few External Obſervances of Religion, think to hide our Shame, and paſs for good Servants and Diſciples of the Lord Jeſus: But this is too thin a covering to conceal our Vileneſs from his Eye, to whom all things lie naked and open, and who knows the very Secrets of the Heart. He that is *indeed* a Follower of Chriſt, and loves him in *Sincerity*, muſt walk as *he* walk'd, imitating his Example, and treading in his Bleſſed Steps, departing from all Iniquity, denying himſelf and all his

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vile Luſts and Affections, obeying chearfully the Holy Commands of his great Lord, and giving all diligence to add to his *Faith Virtue, and to Virtue Knowledg, and to Knowledg Temperance, and to Temperance Patience and to Patience Godlineſs, and to Godlineſs Brotherly Kindneſs, and to Brotherly Kindneſs Charity*; 2 Per. 1. *for if theſe things be in us and abound, they make us that we ſhall be neither Barren nor Unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*; 5, 6, 7, 8. And he only that has thus his *Fruit* unto *Holineſs*, ſhall in the *End* attain Everlaſting Life.

'Tis *Fruit* then, God expects from Chriſtians, not *Leaves*; not the *Form* of Godlineſs, but the *Power* of it; not to be call'd *Lord, Lord*, but to have his Commands *Obeyed*. But, ſince God is infinitely *full* already, and can receive no Addition to his Inexhauſtible Store; ſince our Goodneſs extendeth not to *him*, neither is it any Profit to him that we make our Way perfect: It will not be amiſs to enquire upon what Accounts God ſo ſtrictly and indiſpenſibly requires that we ſhould be Fruitful? And 'tis upon our *own* Account that we might be happy in *this* World, and made *capable* of enjoying the Glories and Felicities of the *Kingdom of Heaven*.

Firſt, God expects the Fruits of Righteouſneſs from all that name the Name of Jeſus, and are planted in his Vineyard, that they may be happy in *this* World.

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'Tis the great Deſign of our good God to make his Creatures *happy*; and becauſe we are plac'd in *this* World to fit and *prepare* our ſelves for *Heaven*, and are to ſpend a Life here *below*; he has given us a *Rule*, which, if we walk by, we ſhall be happy *here* as well as in the world above; and which, if we diſregard and deviate from, a *double* Miſery will be our Portion. And in this God deals with us as a wiſe and good Parent with his Children; he keeps them cloſe to what will conduce to their Happineſs, though he *himſelf* receives no other Benefit by it, than the Hope of ſeeing his *Off ſpring happy*.

'Tis for this Reaſon that our Saviour, the great Dreſſer of God's Vineyard, and his Servants, the Apoſtles, ſo often preſs the Obſervance of ſuch Rules as have chiefly Relation to the Comfortable Living in *this* World; as with Relation to others, *Mercifulneſs*, *Charity*, *Meekneſs*, *Forbearance*, *and Forgiveneſs of Injuries*, *Peaceableneſs*, *Compaſſion and Pity*, together with exact *Juſtice and Honeſty*; without which there would be be no Comfort of *Society*; and Men would be like ſo many Wild Beaſts, preying upon and devouring one another. And with Relation to our *ſelves*, we are taught *Temperance*, *and Sobriety*, *and Chaſtity*, *and Moderation in all things*, *Contentment of Mind*, *Patience*, and the like; without which, neither a Man's Mind or Body would be at Eaſe, nor taſte any Comfort and Happineſs

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in Life. Indeed, God has been pleas'd to annex the Rewards of *Heaven* to the ſincere and conſtant Practice of theſe Virtues, as a further *Encouragement* to Men chearfully and diligently to ſet about them; but 'tis the Happineſs of *this* World that they have a *direct* Influence upon, and are *therefore commanded*, and therefore *encourag'd*, that much Sin and Miſery might be prevented, and Men might be happy in this *lower* World.

For, as for the contrary *Vices*, as *Cruelty and Unmerciſulneſs*, *Rage and Intemperate Anger*, *Uncharitableneſs and Revenge*, *Striſe and Envy*, *Injuſtice and Oppreſſion*, and the like; theſe would make a Hell upon Earth, and quite deſtroy Society and all the Comforts of it, and make the World like a *Deſert*, and force Men to the Shelter of Rocks and Mountains, and Dens and Caves of the Earth: And where-ever *they* ſhould go, if *Intemperance* and ungovern'd *Luſt*, and Inordinate *Deſire* and *Uſe* of the Gratifications of *Senſe*, *Diſcontent* and *Anxiety of Mind*, *Impatience*, and the like, ſhould follow them; their Miſery would be *endleſs*, and Happineſs an utter *Stranger* to them.

And therefore, as much as the Happineſs of Life is to be valu'd, ſo much are we bound to praiſe and adore the Infinite and *Diſintereſſed* Goodneſs of God, who hath given us ſuch Rules of Living as if *obſerv'd*, will *procure* that Happineſs; and who beſides, that we may not *fail* to obſerve them, has over and above propos'd to us ineffably Glorious

Glorious Rewards in Heaven if we *do*, and threatned as great a Misery in Hell if we do *not*. That is, he has done all that is *possible* to be done to make a *free Agent* happy in the World that *now* is, as well as that which is to come; and therefore 'tis highly reasonable that we give all possible Praise and Thanksgiving to that his Infinite Goodness, and use all possible Diligence to *co-operate* with his Gracious Intentions for our Good; for 'tis *our* Happiness that will be promoted by it, not *his*. And this is the first Reason why God so *indispensibly* requires of us the *Fruits of Righteousness*, because 'tis impossible we should be happy even in *this* World without them.

A *second* Reason of this is, because otherwise 'tis impossible we should be happy in the *next* Life.

The Happiness of the next Life, we are well assur'd, consists in an intimate Vision and Enjoyment of *God*; who is the Fountain of Excellency and *Perfection*, and consequently of *Bliss*; and God being an infinitely Pure and *Holy* Being; and it being necessary to *Enjoyment*, that there should be a Correspondence and *Agreeableness* between the Object and the Faculty; no Soul but what is Pure and *Holy*, is *capable* of enjoying a Pure and *Holy God*.

The Soul therefore of every Man, being, since the Fall of *Adam*, stain'd and *polluted*, full of vile Affections and Lusts, such as render it *uncapable* of so *pure* and *Divine* a Happiness;

pineſs; 'tis neceſſary that it ſhould be refined and *purified*, and have Heavenly Affections and Deſires planted in the Room of thoſe Vile and Brutiſh ones, and recover the Divine Likeneſs which has been ſo ſhamefully *defac'd*, that ſo at length, by the Actual Excerciſe of the Divine Life *here*, we may become, in ſome Meaſure, *capable* of enjoying the Celeſtial Happineſs that flows from the Contemplation and Love of the *Supreme Good*. Or, in the Words of St. *John*, that being *like* him in this State of *Probation*, we may be *prepar'd* to ſee *ſee him as he is*, in the Regions of Glory.

And this, an Obſervance of the Precepts of our Holy Religion will effect; and they were *therefore* given that they might effect it. We are exhorted to be *poor in Spirit*, *humble* and *reſign'd* to the Will of God, that ſo we may be conducted ſafely to the Kingdom of Heaven; *to hunger and thirſt after Righteouſneſs*, that we may be *fill'd* with *Grace* here, and *Glory* hereafter; to *mourn* for our former Vileneſs, and Degeneracy, and *Eſtrangement* from God, and flee from all Wickedneſs, and ſincerely endeavour a Reformation, that ſo we may be *comforted* in the Day of Retribution, and, as good and faithful Servants, be receiv'd into the *Joy of our Lord*. We are urg'd to *Purity of Heart* that we may *ſee God*, to be holy as he is holy, perfect as he is perfect, pure as he is pure, becauſe he *hates* Iniquity, and into *his* Preſence no *unclean* thing can enter, and without Holineſs no Man *can*

ſee the Lord. So that the Reaſon why God requires that we ſhould *bring forth Fruit unto Holineſs*, is, that the *end may be everlaſting Life*. Theſe are the Reaſons why God ſo *ſtrictly* and *indiſpenſibly* requires that we ſhould be fruitful of good Works, after he has planted us in his Vineyard, and cultivated us by his Bleſſed Son, and his Servants the Apoſtles, and their Succeſſors, the Biſhops, and other Inferiour Miniſters of his Kingdom. *O that Men would therefore praiſe the Lord for his Goodneſs, and declare the Wonders that he doth for the Children of Men!* Pſal. 107. 8.

The *third* thing this Parable informs us of, is God's *Long-Suffering* towards Sinners, and that, though he does indeed *expect* the Fruits of Righteouſneſs from thoſe that are planted in his Spiritual Vineyard, the Chriſtian Church, yet he expects it with much Patience and *Forbearance*; and is not ſo extremely rigid as to puniſh for the *firſt* Diſappointment he meets with, but waits ſtill *further* to ſee if Time will work Amendment: And this is expreſs'd in the Parable, by the Lord of the Vineyard, his coming *three Years* ſeeking Fruit on his Fig-Tree, and ſtill finding none.

Of this *Long-Suffering* and Forbearance of God, every *Sinner* that is yet *alive* is an Argument. Which of the *beſt* of us have not been *leſs* fruitful than we *ought* to have been, and then God may with the greateſt Reaſon expect from us, conſidering the Means of Improvement that we have enjoy'd; and this not only for *three* Years, but for three many times

times *repeated?* How *many* have been *wholly unfruitful*, and that for Scores of Years, notwithſtanding all the Care and Cultivation of God's Miniſters; and have been all the while in the Service of the great Adverſary of God and Man, doing Deſpight to the Holy Spirit, Slaves to their vile Paſſions and Luſts, without Thought of Religion, and without God in the World: And yet, through God's Infinite Mercy and *Long-Suffering*, are repriev'd from Deſtruction, and ſtill in Poſſibility of Salvation, upon their intire *Repentance*, and bringing forth Fruits *meet* for it for the Future! As many Years as a Sinner has liv'd ſince he could diſcern between Good and Evil, ſo long has God expected Fruit from him, and ſo often been diſappointed, and ſo long patiently *forborn* him; and conſidering how *hateful* Sin is to God, how highly provoking it is for his Creatures that have receiv'd their *Being* from him, and all the Bleſſings they have ſince enjoy'd; nay, for whom his only Son in wondrous Love, ſhed his moſt Precious Blood, that he might purchaſe to himſelf a peculiar People, zealous of good Works; and who have been ſo long planted in his Vineyard, and dreſs'd with the greateſt Publick Care and Tenderneſs, ſo that nothing on *God*'s Side is wanting to their Happineſs; conſidering how provoking 'tis for Creatures, under ſuch *ſtrong* Obligations, to ſerve and obey him to the utmoſt of their Powers, obſtinately and continually for ſo

many Years to rebel againſt him: 'Tis indeed a Miracle of Divine *Forbearance* that any wilful Sinner is on this Side *Hell*. But, to our unſpeakable Comfort, and our unſpeakable *Shame* too, ſo it is; and ſtill this is the Voice of the Father of Compaſſions, *Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil Ways, for why will ye die O Houſe of* Iſrael!

'Tis indeed *of the Lord's Mercies only that we are not conſum'd, and becauſe his Compaſſions fail not, but are new every Morning*; but, though to him *belong Mercies and Forgiveneſſes*, yet to *us* nothing but *Shame and Confuſion of Face*; who have turn'd our Backs ſo long upon ſuch Infinite Long-Suffering and Forbearance, and have refus'd to be intreated to our Happineſs. But let us not be deceiv'd, God's Spirit will not *always* in this Manner ſtrive with us; and he that ſtill *deſpiſes the Riches of* this *his Goodneſs*, and is not by it *led to Repentance*, but *after his Hardneſs and Impenitent Heart, treaſureth up to himſelf Wrath againſt the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God, who will render to every Man according to his Deeds: Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguiſh*, ſhall at length (as *ſlowly* as it moves) certainly overtake him, and cruſh him into Ruine.

Rom. 2. 4, 5, 8.

For ſo, in the next Place we are told in this Parable, That when the Lord of the Vineyard had long expected Fruit from his Fig Tree, and ſtill found none; he ſaid, *Cut it down, why cumbereth it the Ground?*

And

And indeed, God's *Forbearance* and Long-Suffering of Sinners, is so far from being an Encouragement to them to go on still in their Wickedness; that, if they rightly consider it, 'tis a prevailing Motive to a speedy and sincere *Repentance*. For *Forbearance* does imply a preceding *Guilt* and Obnoxiousness to *Punishment*; which, though *respited* for a Time, is not wholly *remitted*; but if it be ineffectual to the *Reformation* of the Sinner, will be at length pour'd down in full Measure upon his Head. And therefore, when a wicked Man reflects upon his evil Course of Life, and withall sees himself as yet *forborn* by the offended Majesty of Heaven, and that he lives as securely as better Men; if his Lusts have not quite blinded his Reason, he must needs conclude that this Forbearance of so *Just* and *Holy* a God, who infinitely *hates* Iniquity, and is resolv'd to punish it, and has declar'd that he will not *finally* spare the guilty; is only in order to his *Amendment*, that so he may have Time to *review* the Actions of his past Life, and attend to the Miserable Consequences of them, and so be inclin'd to *return* to that Obedience to God which hitherto he has so shamefully neglected; because, if he still persists in his Rebellion against his Maker, and is Incorrigible, *Mercy* shall be turn'd into *Judgment*, Destruction shall overtake him like an armed Man, and he shall not escape.

The Divine Justice in this Case may be compar'd to the Course of a *River*; it may

be damm'd up and its Progress hindred for a Time; but unless its Stream be *diverted* some other Way, 'twill swell till at last it bear down the Obstacle, and rush on with greater Violence for being interrupted in its Way: So here, the great Benignity and Compassion of God's Nature may sometimes interpose between the Stroke of Justice, and the wretched Offender, to see if he will repent and do no more wickedly, that so the Divine *Nemesis* may steer another Course; but if all this prove at length to no Purpose, if the Man *refuse to return and seek after God*, he will whet his *Sword and make ready his Arrows against the Face of him*, Vengeance shall then have its *free Course*, and Torrents of God's enflam'd Anger shall overwhelm his Soul for ever. There are many Places in Scripture to this Purpose, and which are so obvious to every Attentive Reader, that they need not be here recited: And truly, *irreclaimable* Sinners are so great a Dishonour to God, and Disparagement to Religion, and like a Contagious *Pest* to Society, that they deserve to be remov'd to a Place more proper for them, the Habitations of the Devil and his Angels.

But still the Compassionate Jesus is our Intercessor; and when, after God's long *abus'd* Forbearance Justice is ready to strike, he pleads in Vertue of his Blood for a still *longer Reprieve:* Hoping that at length the Sinner may be awaken'd by the Sermons of the Gospel, and the inward Motions and Excita-

citations of the Spirit of Life and Holineſs, and *ſee* and *fear* his Danger, and return by Repentance, and do no more wickedly. For ſo in the next Place 'tis ſaid in the *Parable*, that when the Lord of the Vineyard gave Order that the Barren Fig-Tree ſhould be *cut down*, the *Dreſſer* of the Vineyard, by whom our *Saviour* is repreſented, *anſwering, ſaid unto him, let it alone this Year alſo, till I ſhall dig about it and dung it.*

Chriſt is our *merciful and faithful High-Prieſt in things pertaining to God, to make Reconciliation for the Sins of the People, for he knows our Infirmities, and in that he himſelf hath ſuffer'd being tempted, he is able alſo to ſuccour thoſe that are tempted, and ever liveth to make Interceſſion for us* He moves for a ſtill *longer Reſpite*, and promiſes to uſe new Methods that we may become fruitful of ſuch good Works, as will be well pleaſing in his Father's Sight, and accordingly cultivates and manures our Souls with *repeated* Exhortations to Repentance, preſſes the Diſcourſes of his Miniſters ſtill more *home* upon Men's Conſciences, and gives new Aids and Aſſiſtances of his Bleſſed Spirit; provides new Happy Circumſtances by his Providence for our Good, ſuch as a Faithful *Inſtructer*, Good *Converſation* and *Example*, Pious *Books* and Diſcourſes which may warm and enliven a Senſe of Religion in the Soul, and awaken Attention, and ſoften the Heart of Stone, and render it penetrable by the Arguments of the Goſpel, and receptive of the Bleſſed Impreſſi-

Heb. 2, 17, 18.

Heb. 7. 25.

Impreſſions of the Spirit of God: That, as looſening the Mould about the Roots of a Tree, and cheriſhing it with the kindly Warmth of Dung, is very conducive to the ſpreading of its Fibres, and making it flouriſh and grow fruitful; ſo, theſe gracious Methods of the great Dreſſer of God's ſpiritual Vineyard, Chriſt Jeſus, may ſo influence the Souls of Chriſtians, as to make them bear much Fruit, to the Glory of God, and their own everlaſting Salvation.

This is the *laſt* Courſe that can be taken for a Sinner's Safety; and if this will not prevail with him to take care of his Happineſs, there is no longer Hope. 'Tis like the Interceſſion of a Favourite for a Condemn'd Criminal, upon Condition of his better Converſation for the future; but if he again returns to his old vile Courſes, his Friends then abandon him, as one that *deſerves* to periſh. And ſo here in the Parable, Chriſt the Beloved Son of God intercedes for a miſerable Sinner ready for Deſtruction, and begs a *Reprieve* for him, to ſee if Time and farther Care, will cure his Wickedneſs; but if *this* proves ineffectual, there remains nothing but *a fearful Expectation of Judgment and fiery Indignation.* His *Interceſſor* will *then* give him over for *Deſperate*, and ſuffer Juſtice to take its Courſe; for ſo ſaid the Dreſſer of the Vineyard to his Lord, *If after I have digg'd about it, and dung'd it, it bear fruit well; but if not, then after that thou ſhalt cut it down.*

And

And *this*, in the *laſt* Place, repreſents to us the *deplorable* Condition of ſuch, as after all the Methods of Grace for their Reformation, are ſtill *hardned* in their Wickedneſs; Chriſt will no more appear in their Behalf, no more Thought ſhall be taken for their Safety, but their *Compaſſionate Interceſſor* ſhall then become their *ſtern* and inexorable *Judge*.

And, when the dreadful Day of Doom ſhall come, and the miſerable Wretches appear before his Throne, to receive the juſt Recompenſe of their obſtinate Impieties; then ſhall *That Jeſus* who once ſo earneſtly pleaded with God in their *Behalf*, pronounce the Dreadful Sentence, *Depart from me ye Curſed into Everlaſting Fire.* Depart from me your *Saviour*, and *once* compaſſionate *Mediator* between God and You; Be from henceforth and for ever depriv'd of all *Hope* of *Redemption* and Reinſtatement into the Favour of my Father; Be baniſh'd for ever from all Intercourſe with *Heaven*, without any *Interceſſor*, any *propitiatory Sacrifice*, any *Advocate* to plead their Cauſe, and without any Place for *Repentance* to Eternal Ages: Depart to the Regions of Endleſs *Horror* and *Deſpair*, in the Society of the *Devil* and *his Angels*. And this is but the juſt Demerit of your *Obſtinate Wickedneſs*, who *deſpis'd the Goodneſs of God that ſhould have led you to Repentance.*

This is the ſad End of *Irreclaimable* Sinners; this is the Puniſhment of an *unfruitful*

ful Profeſſion of Chriſtianity: Wherefore, let thoſe conſider this that forget God, before it be too *late*, leſt he pluck them away, and there be none to deliver them; Let them no longer turn the Grace and *Forbearance* of God into *Laſciviouſneſs*, but work out their Salvation with *Fear* and *Trembling*. For God is *juſt* as well as *merciful*; and though *ſlow to Wrath, and of great Goodneſs, repenting him of the Evil*, yet he will *by no means clear the* obſtinately *guilty*, but to ſuch is a *Conſuming Fire*.

The PRAYER.

I.

O Merciful God, who haſt planted me in the Vineyard of thy dear Son, the Chriſtian Church; and by the Culture of thy Miniſters, and the enlivening Influences of thy Bleſſed Spirit, haſt taken tender Care of my Growth, and that I thrive and flouriſh in all ſpiritual Excellencies till I be fit to be tranſplanted to thy Heavenly Paradiſe; I bleſs thy infinite Goodneſs for the Enlargement of this thy Vineyard, ſo as to extend even to us, though ſo remote from thy firſt Plantation; and for thoſe extraordinary Helps we of this Church have, in order to our Increaſe in all the Fruits of the Spirit: And earneſtly beg, that we may not produce Leaves only, the mock Appearances of Chriſtian Vertue, but the Fruit of a ſincere

cere Religion, in all the Inſtances of Holy Converſation.

II.

I acknowledge, with Admiration at thy infinite Love to Mankind, that 'tis *Our* Happineſs thou reſpecteſt, in thus indiſpenſibly requiring Fruit of us, not any Acquiſition to thy ſelf, who art infinitely full already, and the overflowing Fountain of all poſſible Good: Thou commandeſt that our Fruit ſhould be unto Holineſs, becauſe we ſhall otherwiſe be incapable of the bleſſed End of Everlaſting Life, and ſpend our Days in Miſery in this Lower World. O Lord, as is thy Majeſty, ſo is thy Mercy! O make me duely ſenſible of thy tender Care of my Happineſs, and may it never, through my wretched Obſtinacy, be in vain! And in vain it would be, were not thy long-ſuffering wonderful. With what amazing Patience doſt thou wait to ſee if at length I ſhall be Fruitful! How often have I diſappointed thy juſt Expectations, and yet thou haſt ſtill forborn me through thine own Compaſſions and the Interceſſion of my dear Redeemer, the Dreſſer of thy Vineyard, who hath ply'd me with new Methods of Converſion, freſh Applications to invigorate my Piety, that at the laſt I may return thee acceptable Fruits, and eſcape the ſad Puniſhment of Barrenneſs. Thou haſt done all, O bleſſed God, that can be done to ſecure the Happineſs of Rational and Free Agents: I therefore beg, with

with all the Earneſtneſs of an awaken'd Soul, that thy Goodneſs, Long-ſuffering, and Forbearance, may ſoften my Spirit, and lead me to Repentance, and melt me into Shame, and Tears of Penitential Sorrow, for having ſo long abuſed the tender Kindneſs of ſo good a God. O let not thy Lenity ever extinguiſh the Dread of thy Vengeance, which though ſlow is ſure; and may I ſeriouſly conſider, that if this thy Mercy is not effectual to my Reformation, 'twill but add weight to the Eternal Ruine I deſerve. May theſe Conſiderations, moſt gracious God, never depart from my Mind till Fruit be added to my Leaves, and I experience the *Power* of True Godlineſs; which Thing if thou wilt grant me, then will I praiſe thee without ceaſing, and magnifie thy Goodneſs for ever and ever. *Amen*, *Amen*.

PARABLE

Parable XI.

Of the Prodigal Son.

Luke xv. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24.

And Jeſus ſaid, a certain Man had two Sons:

And the younger of them ſaid to his Father, Father, give me the portion of Goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his Living.

And not many days after, the younger Son gather'd all together, and took his Journey into a far Country, and there waſted his Subſtance in riotous living.

And when he had ſpent all, there aroſe a mighty Famine in that Land; and he began to be in want.

And

And he went and joyned himself to a Citizen of that Country, and he sent him into his Fields to feed Swine.

And he would fain have filled his Belly with the Husks that the Swine did eat; and no man gave unto him.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired Servants of my Fathers have Bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with Hunger!

+ *I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee,*

And am no more worthy to be called thy Son, make me as one of thy hired Servants.

And he arose, and came to his Father. But when he was yet a great way off, his Father saw him, and had Compassion, and ran, and fell on his Neck, and kissed him.

And the Son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son.

But the Father said to his Servants, bring forth the best Robe, and put it on him, and put a Ring on his Hand, and Shooes on his Feet.

And

And bring hither the fatted Calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry.
For this my Son was dead and is alive again; he was loſt and is found.

THIS whole Chapter, from the Third Verſe to the End, is intended to repreſent the great Tenderneſs and *Compaſſion* of God towards Sinners; his great Deſire that they ſhould *Repent*, and turn from their wicked Courſes; and how highly pleaſing to him it is, when they ſincerely do ſo. And this is expreſs'd in Three Parables; The Firſt, of a Man's ſeeking diligently a Sheep that he had loſt, and leaving the reſt of his Flock till he had found it; and then rejoycing greatly, and telling his Neighbours the good News, and inviting them to partake of his Joy. The Second is, of a Woman's having loſt a Piece of Silver, and ſeeking very carefully till ſhe had found it; and then, in like manner, rejoycing with her Friends for *her* good Succeſs. And the Third Parable is, that of the *Prodigal Son:* And becauſe they are All to the ſame purpoſe, 'twill be ſufficient to diſcourſe of *One* of them only; and the *Laſt* being the moſt *full* and *comprehenſive*, I ſhall conſider *That*.

The Occaſion of Our Lord's ſpeaking theſe Parables, was, The *Scribes* and *Phariſees* finding fault with him for Inſtructing and

And he went and joyned himself to a Citizen of that Country, and he sent him into his Fields to feed Swine.

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And he arose, and came to his Father. But when he was yet a great way off, his Father saw him, and had Compassion, and ran, and fell on his Neck, and kissed him.

And the Son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son.

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The Occaſion of Our Lord's ſpeaking theſe Parables, was, The *Scribes* and *Phariſees* finding fault with him for Inſtructing and

and Converſing with *Publicans* and *Sinners*; for they look'd upon it as very ſcandalous, and a kind of *Pollution*, to have any Familiarity with thoſe *worſt* of Men, as they thought them, and murmur'd againſt our Saviour, ſaying, *This Man receiveth Sinners, and eateth with them*, ver. 2. To this Objection of theirs againſt him, he anſwers in the Parables before mention'd, and ſhews, how unreaſonably uncharitable they were, to think much of his Teaching and Converſing with thoſe, who *becauſe* the vileſt of Men, had therefore the moſt *Need* of his holy Inſtructions and excellent Example, that they might be Reform'd and Reclaim'd from their wicked Practices. For, as he ſaid elſewhere, the *Whole* have no need of a Phyſician, but thoſe that are *Sick*; and therefore he came to Seek and to Save thoſe that were *loſt*, and *Not to call the Righteous but Sinners to Repentance*. Nay more, he tells them in the *7th* and *10th* Verſes of this Chapter, that *There ſhall be more Joy in Heaven, in the Preſence of the Angels of God, over One Sinner that Repenteth, than over Ninety and Nine Juſt Perſons that need no Repentance*; or ſuch a *total* Change of Mind as is in a Sinner that *breaks off* his vile Courſes by Repentance. And farther to explain and enforce this great and moſt comfortable Truth, and repreſent it more lively to their Apprehenſions, he ſpake the Parable of the *Prodigal Son*; and therein, very naturally and movingly, expreſſes theſe *Four* Things. *Firſt*,

First, The great *Extravagancy* of Wicked Men, when they give themselves up to the Conduct of their *own* Wills and Affections, and are weary of the Government of God their Heavenly Father.

Secondly, The *sad* Condition such Men quickly reduce themselves to by that their Extravagancy and loose self-will'd Course of Life, or in other Words, the miserable Consequences of Debauchery and Riot.

Thirdly, The sharp *Remorse* of *Conscience* that attends such Courses, the Shame and Sorrow for them, and the Resolutions of an *awaken'd* Sinner to return again to his Obedience to God. And

Fourthly, The great *Tenderness* and *Compassion* of the Father of Spirits to such as Repent in *earnest*, and *keep* their Resolutions; His Readiness to receive them again to his Favour, and great Joy for their Return, *Because they were dead but are alive again, were lost but are found.* Which last Particular is the *Reason* of the *greater* Joy that is in Heaven over one *Sinner* that *Repenteth*, than over Ninety and Nine *Just* Persons that *need* no Repentance; and is a very satisfactory Account of our Lord's so often Conversing with and Instructing *Publicans* and *Sinners*: For they had the most *need* of that great Physician of Souls, and consequently *their* Salvation would cause the *greatest* Joy in Heaven; and therefore our Compassionate Saviour so industriously endeavour'd their *Conversion*. And, had

the *Pharisees* had any of that Goodness in them they so much *pretended* to, they would have *rejoyced* at our Lord's Charity, and *admir'd* and *lov'd* him for it, rather than have *murmur'd* at it as they did, and used it as an *Objection* against him.

The *first* Thing express'd in this Parable is the great *Extravagancy* of Wicked Men when they give themselves up to the Guidance of their own Wills and Affections, and are weary of the Government of God their Heavenly Father. 'Tis represented here, by a Prodigal Young-Man's leaving his Father and rambling into a far Country, and there wasting his Substance with *Riotous Living*.

Impatience of Government and *Restraint*, and a Desire of being *Free*, and at Liberty to follow their own Inclinations and Propensions; is that which first prompts Men, with the young Prodigal in the Parable, to leave their Heavenly Father, and get as far from his Government as they can; and when they have laid aside the Thoughts of *Religion*, then to take their Swing, and do what seems good in their own Eyes. And with this *fancied* Liberty they are at *first* mightily *pleas'd*, and wish it could be *always* so; that is, that there were no *God*, or no *Religion* to awe and *confine* their Desires; but that they might be a Law unto themselves, and their own Will the sole Measure of their Actions: For so the Foolish Young-Man in the Parable, we read could not be satisfied

ſatisfied till he had his Fortune in his own Hands, to diſpoſe of as he liſted; *Father, give me the portion of Goods that belongeth to me*; and as ſoon as he had it, he got as far from his Father as he could, and then, denied not his Soul whatever it deſired, or as the Parable hath it, *Not many days after, the younger Son gather'd all together, and took his Journey into a far Country, and there waſted his Subſtance with Riotous Living.*

And juſt ſo it is with a Sinner. He finds *Religion* will oblige him to a *ſerious* and circumſpect Converſation, and that if he continues in the Family of the Faithful, he muſt live *ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent World*, and *deny* his Bodily Appetites and Deſires, and keep them under Subjection to the Spirit; and imitate the Excellencies of his Heavenly Father, *be holy, pure, and perfect, as he is*, becauſe he abominates Iniquity, and into his Preſence no unclean Thing can enter. But theſe are *hard* Sayings; this is a Servitude that he looks upon as *unſufferable*; and he has (as he thinks) a much eaſier and pleaſanter way of Living in his Eye, and which he *longs* to experience; and therefore reſolves, once for all, to ſhake off the galling Yoke of Religion, and get as far from the Government of his divine Parent as he can, and become his own Maſter; and then he thinks he ſhall be happy. So blinded are Sinners by the Deceitfulneſs of Sin, as to ſhun Happineſs and embrace Ruin; to look upon the *Glorious*

Liberty of the Sons of God as the greateſt *Slavery*, and exchange it for the vile Drudgery of Vice; to run from that bleſſed Being who is the Fountain of Perfection and Happineſs, and inſiſt in the Track that leads to Eternal Ruin! An unfortunate End is always the Conſequence of lawleſs Liberty; and as a Ship without a Helm or Governour, inſtead of arriving at the Haven, is ſoon ſplit upon Rocks, or overwhelm'd with Quickſands; ſuch is the Caſe of a Sinner, that impatient of the gentle Reſtraints of Religion, is reſolved to quit it, and take his own Courſe.

But why ſhould Men be ſo weary of the Government of God, and deſire ſo earneſtly to be at their own Diſpoſal? Is not Religion the moſt *Reaſonable* Service? And ſhould it not be the greateſt Pleaſure to a Rational Creature to act according to the beſt Reaſon. Is not God the *wiſeſt*, the moſt *powerful*, and the moſt kind and *indulgent* Being too? And is it not more eligible to be *govern'd* by infinite *Wiſdom*, and *directed* in the right Track to *Happineſs* by infinite *Goodneſs*, and *ſhielded* from Dangers by infinite *Power*; than to be hurried on by the blind Force of bruiſh and unruly Paſſions to our Unhappineſs and Deſtruction, and expoſe our ſelves to all the Malice of Hell, by yielding to the Temptations of the Devil, and forfeiting the Protection of the Almighty? Certainly, if Men would but *conſider*, inſtead of deſiring with the Prodi-

Prodigal Son, to be free from the Government of this our Heavenly Father, and to take their *own* Courſe at a *Diſtance* from him; they would ſay with Holy *David*, *One Day in thy Courts is better than a Thouſand, I had rather be a Door-keeper in the Houſe of my God, than to dwell in the Tents of Ungodlineſs*; and confeſs in the Words of our Church, that his Service is perfect Freedom. And the ſilly young Prodigal in the Parable ſoon found by a coſtly Experience, the Difference between living under the mild and prudent Government of his Father, and being left to the Conduct of his own ill inſtructed and *green* Head. But before I proceed to this Conſideration, I ſhall briefly ſhew how fitly *Vice* is repreſented by *Prodigality*.

Prodigality, in the Words of this Parable, is *waſting a Man's Subſtance* or Eſtate, *in riotous* or profuſe and extravagant *Living*; or without any Regard to the *future*, ſquandring away what he has in exceſſive Luxury: And therefore a wicked Man is certainly the *greateſt Prodigal* in the World, becauſe he *waſtes* and deſtroys what is of the greateſt *Value* and Eſteem, and that in the moſt *profligate* Manner, without any thought of what ſhall be *hereafter*, only that he may gratifie his preſent Appetites and Deſires. For,

Firſt, Nothing is a more *ſubſtantial* Good, and more to be priz'd and carefully *preſerv'd* than the *Grace of God*, or thoſe Bleſſed Mo-

tions and Inſpirations of the Holy Spirit, whereby Men are inwardly inclin'd to *purſue* what will make for their Eternal *Happineſs*, and *diſſwaded* from, and warned to *avoid* what will bring them to endleſs Ruine. Now this *Grace of God* a Sinner turns into *Laſciviouſneſs*; deſpiſes and neglects, nay *reſiſts* the Motions of the Spirit of Life and Holineſs, and cloſes with the Temptations and Suggeſtions of the Spirit of Vileneſs and Impurity; and does this ſo *continually* and with ſo much *Obſtinacy*, that he daily waſtes that ineſtimable Treaſure, and more and more grieves that Bleſſed Spirit, and forces him to withdraw his Influences, till at length they are quite *extinguiſh'd* in his Soul, and a deſperate ſpiritual *Poverty* ſucceed, an utter *Want* of that Divine Grace, which they ſo profligately waſted when they had it. And no Poverty certainly ſo miſerable as that which will ſtarve and famiſh the *Soul*, and bring it to *Eternal Death*; and therefore no Prodigality like that which ſquanders away that which is the only Nouriſhment of the Spiritual Life: Eſpecially if we conſider for *what* it is that a Sinner is thus prodigal of ſo great a Treaſure, namely, the gratifying a few Brutiſh Luſts, and the acting ſuch Vices as bring no true *Satisfaction* along with them, but are full of *Vexation* and *Diſappointment* in *this* World, and will at laſt ſink the Soul into the loweſt Hell.

Secondly, *Time* is likewiſe a very ſubſtantial Good, and highly to be valu'd, and carefully

carefully improv'd, because 'tis the only Opportunity we have of securing our main Interest, the Happiness of *Eternity*; and when *Time* shall be at an *End*, that is, to every *particular* Person when Death shall put a Period to this Life, then comes that Night in which no Man can work, then the Opportunity shall be for ever at an End, and according as Men have improv'd or wasted their *Time* in *this* World, so shall their *Eternity* be *happy* or *miserable* in the *next*. And therefore, he is indeed very foolishly prodigal, who without any Thought of hereafter, wastes this precious Treasure, this only Opportunity of making himself for ever happy, in *Vanity* and *Folly*, in pleasing and humouring his Body, and neglects the Improvement of his Soul; and instead of *working out his Salvation with Fear and trembling*, secures to himself Eternal *Misery*. And this does every wilful Sinner, when, with the Prodigal in the Parable, he wastes this his Substance in Luxurious and Riotous Living, and studies nothing but how to gratifie the *lower* Life, looking no further than this present World for Happiness, 'till his Opportunity be quite lost, and he is surpriz'd into an unchangeably Miserable Condition, because when 'twas put into his Hand to make himself *happy* if he *would*, he neglected it, and chose the Track to *Ruine*.

Thirdly, The Glorious Reversion of our *Heavenly Inheritance*, is a Treasure likewise that can never be sufficiently valu'd; *for Eye*

hath not ſeen nor Ear heard, neither can it enter into the Heart of Man to conceive, the Felicities and Glories of it. Now this, we are aſſur'd by him that cannot *lie*, and whoſe it is to *beſtow*, ſhall be the Reward of Vertue and ſincere Religion; all this is laid up for them that love God and keep his Commandments. And therefore, for a Man that knows all this to be ſo, prodigally to throw away all Expectation of, and Title to ſuch a Reverſion as this, upon ſuch low and profligate Accounts as the wallowing in the filthy Pleaſures of a Goat or a Swine, or the heaping up Treaſures of Gold and Silver which are as *unſatisfying* as they are *uncertain* and *periſhing*, or for the Sake of a little empty Honour, or the like: This is the very Highth of profligate Extravagancy, and ſuch, as one would think, no ſenſible Man ſhould ever be guilty of.

Upon theſe and many other, nay, indeed *all* Accounts, 'tis very true that a wicked Man is the greateſt Prodigal in the World; for he waſtes and throws away what is of higheſt Value to a Man; and that, for what is no better than *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit*.

And thus much for the *firſt thing* expreſſed in this Parable, *viz.* the great *Extravagancy* of ungodly Men, when they give themſelves up to the Guidance of their *own* Wills and Affections, and grow weary of the Government of *God* their Heavenly Father: Like the Prodigal Son, they *waſte* their moſt precious *Subſtance*, in *riotous and profligate living*. The

The *ſecond* thing expreſs'd in this Parable, is the *ſad Condition* ſuch Men ſoon reduce themſelves to by that their Extravagancy and looſe ſelf-will'd Courſe of Life; or in other Words, the Miſerable *Conſequences* of Debauchery and Riot, and of following ſo *Blind* a Guide as Mens unruly Paſſions and Luſts. For ſo in the Parable, when the prodigal Young Man had *ſpent all, there aroſe a mighty Famine in that Land, and he began to be in Want, and went and joyn'd himſelf to a Citizen of that Country, who ſent him into his Fields to feed Swine: And he would fain have fill'd his Belly with the Husks that the Swine did eat, but no Man gave unto him.*

The *firſt* ill Conſequence then of this *Prodigality* or Lawleſs Extravagant Living, is Spiritual *Want*; or a Scarcity and *Famine* of the Divine *Grace* in the *Soul*; which is by ſo much more to be dreaded than a Famine of Proviſions for the *Body*, as *Eternal* Miſery and Death is more terrible than *Temporal*. The Grace of God, is queſtionleſs the Nouriſhment of the Divine Life; and which, if once withdrawn, will leave the Soul *dead in Treſpaſſes and Sins*: Now an obſtinate Courſe of Diſobedience to the Divine Will, drives out that Life-giving Power, and makes the Soul *uncapable* of Vital Union with ſo pure a Spirit; and, as a Humane Soul is *forc'd* to leave a Body rotten and *waſted*, and unapt any longer to *entertain* it, ſo this *Divine Spirit* is *thruſt* out from a *corrupted* ſinful *Soul*, And conſequently, there muſt

muſt be a *famine* in that Soul of that Heavenly *Bread* which is abſolutely *neceſſary* to eternal *Life*; and the Conſequence of that is Eternal *Death*.

And certainly, no Man that conſiders what a Diſmal Condition that Soul is in, which is reduced to ſuch *Extremity* of Spiritual Want as this; how full of Horrour and Deſpair as doom'd to endleſs Miſery, and *ſeal'd* up to Deſtruction, which he ſees daily nearer and nearer approaching, and *no* way to *eſcape*, but (like a Wretch immur'd between two Walls, there to be ſtarv'd to Death) in continual Expectation of her ſad End: No Man that conſiders this, with that Seriouſneſs he ought, but will be very careful not to *waſte* what is ſo *neceſſary* to his Spiritual *Subſiſtence*; *i. e.* by no means grieve, or reſiſt, or quench that Life-giving Spirit, by whom all true Religion *lives, and moves, and hath its Being*, and which if neglected and oppos'd will be *withdrawn*, and that perhaps for *ever*. If like *Eſau*, we ſell this ineſtimable *Bleſſing* for a Meſs of *Pottage*, forfeit the Food of our Souls that we may indulge our Senſual Appetites, we may fear that a Spiritual *Famine* will be our Puniſhment, and no Place left for Repentance, no Bleſſing remaining for us, though we ſeek it *earneſtly with Tears*. As the Prodigal in the Parable, when, after he had waſted his Subſtance in riotous Living, and then *wanted*, and was ready to periſh with Hunger, ſo that he would have been glad of the meaneſt

meaneſt and coarſeſt Fare, would fain have fill'd his Belly with the *Huſks that the Swine did eat*; even *that* he could not obtain, for *no Man*, ſays the Parable, *gave unto him.*

Another ill Conſequence of this Spiritual Prodigality, and looſe wicked Courſe of Life (and to name no more amongſt a numerous Train of them) is, that it extreamly degrades and *debaſes* a Man, and engages him in the *vileſt* Drudgery imaginable, the ſerving *Beſtial Luſts*, and *Deviliſh Paſſions.* This is expreſs'd in the Parable by the *Prodigal's* being ſent into the Feilds to *feed Swine*; a thing the moſt *abject* in it *ſelf*, and the moſt deteſtable to the *Jews* (to whom our Lord ſpake the Parable) who were taught by their Law to eſteem that Creature among the moſt *unclean.* And as low or *lower* than this does he debaſe his Nature, who, neglecting the *Noble* Precepts of *Religion*, makes his *Senſual* Appetite the Rule and Meaſure of his Actions. For what more *Beaſtly* and Deteſtable than *ungovern'd Luſt?* The wretch himſelf that is guilty of it is aſham'd *publickly* to commit it, and takes Advantage of Holes and Corners, and the Night to hide his abominable Wickedneſs, and his own *Bluſhes* that attend the Commiſſion of it

What puts a Man upon more pittiful and *unmanly* Shifts to attain his Deſire? What ſneaking and cringing to a baſe Strumpet, and her baſer Servants, before Acceſs can be had to a Neighbours Bed, or a Virgin Innocence defil'd? And

And as much may be ſaid of the Shame of *Drunkenneſs*, that *Swiniſh* Vice, which makes a Man more vile and deſpicable than the fouleſt of Brutes. 'Tis a Vice every Way odious and unmanly, and full of the moſt deteſtable Conſequences, and branded with the *baſeſt* Character, even by *Infidels*: And ſo of all other Senſual Vices, the Shame and Baſeneſs is notorious.

Theſe *Deviliſh Paſſions* likewiſe, to which Men become ſubject that throw off the Government of Religion, ſuch as *pride, Vain-Glory and Hypocriſy, Envy, Hatred and Malice*, and ſuch like; do greatly defile our excellent Nature, and are the greateſt Diſparagement to thoſe that ſuffer their Minds to be infeſted with them; as would be ſoon apparent, could we but perſwade them to ſo much Serioufneſs as to recollect with themſelves how odious theſe Vices have appear'd when they have met with them in *other* Men. And if they look ſo ill in *others*, certainly no Man can be ſo beſotted as to think them *amiable* Qualifications in *himſelf*; but muſt confeſs, that whoever is ſo fooliſhly prodigal as to waſte and ſquander away what is of *real* Excellency, as *Vertue* is in the Eyes of all Men, and gives himſelf up to ſuch Deviliſh Paſſion as thoſe before mention'd, and the Service of ſuch vile Luſts; Debaſes himſelf much lower than that vile Office of ſerving the vileſt of Brutes. Great Reaſon therefore have ſuch Men ſeriouſly to bethink themſelves, and attend to the

Remorſe

Remorſe of their Conſciences, which goes along with ſuch Courſes, and being once awaken'd, reſolve to return again to their Obedience to God. Which is the

Third thing expreſs'd in this Parable, by the Prodigal Son's *coming to himſelf*, and thus reaſoning. *How many hired Servants of my Father's have Bread enough and to ſpare, and I periſh with Hunger! I will ariſe and go to my Father, and will ſay unto him, Father, I have ſinned againſt Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be call'd thy Son, make me as one of thy hired Servants.*

Miſery, and *Shame*, and *Repentance* always tread cloſe at the Heels of *Wickedneſs*; and indeed, ſo *much* Miſery and Shame, as Sin is the Occaſion of, muſt needs make any Man that *conſiders* and is not *hardned* in his Iniquity, to repent and be *ſorry* that ever he committed it. *When ye were the Servants of Sin*, ſays the Apoſtle to the *Romans*, *ye were free from Righteouſneſs*; ye had what ye deſired, and liv'd without God and Religion in the World, and were a Law unto your ſelves (as the Prodigal, weary of his Father's Inſpection over him, deſir'd his Portion and went into a far Country, and there liv'd riotouſly and without Controul) *But what Fruit had ye of thoſe things whereof ye are now aſham'd? For the End of theſe things is Death.* And this the young Prodigal found too true likewiſe by a ſad Experience, and waſted what he had and was ready to periſh with Hunger, and glad to ſubmit to the baſeſt

Rom. 6. 20, 21.

baſeſt Servitude for Suſtenance, and at laſt was fain, with much *Shame* and *Repentance*, to return to his Father, and humbly confeſs his Folly and Unworthineſs to be call'd any more his *Son*, and deſir'd only the Favour of being made as one of his hired Servants. The Works of Darkneſs, as St. *Paul* ſays, are always *unfruitful* of any thing that is really *ſatisfying* and good; but bring forth *Briars* and *Thorns* in Abundance, many Troubles and Vexations, wherewith to tear and torment the miſerable ſinful Soul.

Let us conſider a little more *particularly* this *Reſolution* of the Prodigal to return to his Father, and *when* it was that he took it up.

The Parable ſays, he made this Reſolution, *when he came to himſelf*, and conſidered how many of his Father's *hired Servants* had Bread enough, and to ſpare, while he that was his *Son* was ready to *periſh with Hunger*.

Indeed, every *wicked* Man is *beſide himſelf*, out of his *Reaſon* and his *Wits*;

Quem mala ſtultitia & quæcunque inſcitia veri
Cæcum agit, inſanum Gryſippi porticus & grex.
Horat. Serm. Lib. II. Sat. 3.

——— ubi parva
Stultitia, hic ſumma eſt inſania: Qui ſceleratus,
Et furioſus erit,——— Horat. ibid.

For what Man of a *ſound* Mind would act ſo ſtrangely and make ſuch diſadvantagious Choices, as a *Sinner* does? Who with his Wits

Wits about him would take all Ways poſſible to make himſelf *miſerable* to all Eternity, and when at the ſame time too, he might with leſs Trouble make himſelf eternally *happy*? Who, that could make uſe of his Reaſon, would chuſe to enjoy the Happineſs of a *Brute*, a *Goat* or a *Swine* for Inſtance, rather than that of a *Man* or an *Angel*, nay, of God himſelf? Who but a *Fool* or a *Madman* would part with the *certain Reverſion* of a *Crown* and *Scepter*, for the *preſent* Poſſeſſion of a Bag of Counters? And yet, this does every obſtinate Sinner do, and therefore may well be ſaid to be void of Reaſon, and beſide himſelf; but, becauſe he is *wilfully* ſo, and *will* not make *uſe* of his *Reaſon* to the Purpoſes for which it was given him, *his* Madneſs is his *Fault* rather than his *Misfortune*, and the *Extravagances* of it will be without *Excuſe*.

In this *moral* Frenzie was the Prodigal in the Parable, when he left his *Father* and waſted his Subſtance afar off in Exceſs of Riot; till at length the ſad *Conſequences* of his Extravagancy, brought him again to his Reaſon; and when he *came to himſelf*, he reſolv'd to *ariſe and return to his Father*, &c.

A Man's *coming to himſelf*, in a Religious Senſe, is the making *uſe* of his *Reaſon* in reflecting upon the paſt Errors and Miſcarriages of his Life; in conſidering the many ſad *Conſequences* of Vice, and the great *Obligation* we have upon all Accounts to live *religiouſly*, and fully purpoſing upon ſuch Conſideration,

to

to break off all evil Courſes, and live for the Future as becomes *Men* and *Chriſtians*. For a Man is never more *himſelf*, than when he exerciſes his Reaſon upon the beſt of Objects, *Religion*; and conſiders how he may beſt conform himſelf to the Holy Rules of Chriſtianity, and purpoſes to do accordingly: And he that ſuffers himſelf to be hurried on by impetuous Paſſions and unruly Luſts, to commit vile Actions, and neglects to make uſe of his Reaſon to govern and keep in *order* his Affections, acts more like a *Brute* than a *Man*, and is not yet *come to himſelf*.

Conſideration is indeed the *Life* of both *ſpeculative* and *practical* Religion; and then 'tis, that Men *believe* and *live amiſs*, when they ceaſe to *conſider* as they ought. For, there is ſo much of *Truth* and *Evidence* in the things a Chriſtian is to *believe*; and the things he is to *do*, are ſo *excellent* in themſelves, and ſo conducive to *intire* Happineſs both here and hereafter; that no Man, that *duly* conſiders and *attends* to either, but will be powerfully inclin'd to *aſſent* to the one, and *practiſe* the other, and be no longer an Infidel or Heretick, or live a vicious irreligious Life.

'Twas *Conſideration* made the Prodigal Son reſolve to return to his Father, and humble himſelf before him; and could the Sinners of this Age be perſwaded ſeriouſly to *conſider* and *weigh* things together, they would ſoon ſee Reaſon enough to convince them that 'tis their

their wiſeſt Courſe to live at another Rate than formerly, and put an End to their Extravagances by Repentance.

But *what* did this Prodigal conſider when he came to himſelf, that ſo powerfully inclin'd him to return to his Father with ſuch an humble and ſhameful Confeſſion of his Extravagancy? 'Twas *this*; *How many of my Father's hired Servants have Bread enough and to ſpare, and I periſh with Hunger?* He found by a woful Experience, that however uneaſie 'twas to him formerly to be under his Father's Eye, and in Subjection to his Commands; 'twas by far a happier Condition than that, which by his Prodigality he was then reduc'd to: The meaneſt of his Father's *Servants* was in happier Circumſtances than *he*, and therefore he thought it his wiſeſt Courſe to ariſe and return to his Father. And ſo would it be with a Sinner, would he but *compare* a Virtuous and Vicious Courſe of Life together. He would find by his own ſad Experience if he would but attend to it, that all his Extravagances, from which at firſt he expected to reap ſo much Happineſs, are not only *Vanity*, empty and unſatisfying, but likewiſe *Vexation of Spirit*; full of Troubles and Misfortunes, attended with Shame and Diſgrace, inward *Remorſe* and Gripings of Conſcience, and dire Forbodings of the Wrath to come. And this would ſoon convince him of the much greater Happineſs of Obedience and Submiſſion to the Will of God; for that has

none of all this Misery, but *Peace* of Conscience, inward *Contentment* and *Satisfaction* of Mind, and the comfortable Expectation of Eternal Happiness in the Presence of God. And the *Conclusion* of such Considerations, would be, his Resolution to arise and go to his Heavenly Father, and with much Humility and sincere Contrition say unto him, *Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be call'd thy Son, make me as one of thy hired Servants.* And indeed, the poorest good Man that is a diligent and faithful Servant of God, is in an infinitely happier Condition than the greatest *wicked* Prince; he experiences more true Happiness even in this World, and when he shall hear the joyful Sound at the Day of Judgment, *Well done good and faithful Servant, enter into the Joy of thy Lord*, and wicked Emperors be thrust away, with *I know you not, depart from me ye Workers of Iniquity*; then shall all the World *discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not*: The *former* shall have *Bread enough, and to spare*, their Happiness shall be compleat and *full*; while the *latter* shall perish with a keen Hunger after what they shall never enjoy, and for ever be sent *empty away*.

After the Prodigal had *consider'd* himself into a Resolution of *returning* to his Father, he put his Resolution into *practice*, and arose and *came* to his Father, and said, *Father, I have sinned*, &c.

And

And truly, 'tis not bare *reſolving* that is ſufficient to Amendment of Life; we muſt *act* agreeably, and that *immediately* too, or elſe our Reſolutions, though never ſo earneſtly made, will vaniſh into *nothing*, and the Breach of them ſtill more increaſe our *Guilt*. For, when a Man has proceeded ſo far towards a new Life, as to *reſolve* to forſake every Evil Way, and no longer to inſiſt in his former Vile Courſes; 'tis a ſign that his Soul is rous'd and *awaken'd* from its ſpiritual Sleep, that his Eyes are *open'd*, and that he *diſcerns* his Error; and if after all this, he *ſtill* perſiſts in it, he then ſins againſt clear *Light* and *Knowledge*, which is the higheſt Aggravation of a Fault.

As a Sinner therefore ſhould, as ſoon as he is become ſenſible of his Sin, immediately *reſolve* to *forſake* it, and return to his Obedience to God; ſo muſt he immediately put his Reſolution into Practice: for otherwiſe, he does but mock God, and deceive his own Soul, and will only increaſe his Damnation. A well-grounded Reſolution is a good *Preparative* to Amendment, but 'tis but a *Preparative*; and to *reſolve* to do a Thing, and *actually* to do it, are two very different Things. We all of us, I hope, that pretend to be Chriſtians, ſo far conſider, as to grieve and be aſham'd for having offended our Good God; and are at *that* inſtant reſolv'd never willingly to tranſgreſs his Holy Will again: Let us but *keep* our Reſolutions, and we ſhall be Happy;

for, such as with the Prodigal, *actually* return to their Heavenly Father, and humble themselves before him, he is ready, with the greatest Expressions of Kindness, to receive to his Favour. Which brings me to the

Last Thing express'd in this Parable; (*viz.*) The great Tenderness and Compassion of the Father of Spirits to such as repent in earnest, and perform their Resolves of Amendment; his Readiness to be reconciled to them, and extraordinary Joy for their Return, *because they were dead but are alive again, were lost but are found.* For so 'tis said in the Parable, That when the Returning Prodigal was yet *a great way off, his Father saw him, and had Compassion, and ran, and fell on his Neck, and kissed him, and said to his Servants, Bring forth the best Robe, and put it on him, and put a Ring on his Hand, and Shooes on his Feet, and bring hither the fatted Calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry.*

While he was *yet a great way off*, his Father had *Compassion*, *and ran to meet him.* By this is express'd God's great Desire that a Sinner's Repentance should be *compleated*; he will *meet* him, and that with more than ordinary Assistances of his Spirit, lest any Temptation should so far prevail as to *divert* his Return, and make him *change* or *defer* to put in *practice*, that good Resolution he had taken up. He *prevents* a *real* Penitent with the Riches of his Grace, and while

while he is yet a *great way off*, labouring with the Difficulties that attend a thorough Change of Life; he, with infinite Charity and Compassion, comes forth to *meet* him, that by his Divine Aid he may secure his Retreat from the Endeavours of the Devil and his own vile Affections, to bring him back to his former vain and wicked Courses, which by God's Grace he has resolved to break off by Repentance.

And when a Sinner's Repentance is *compleated*, and he is actually return'd with Shame and Sorrow to his Heavenly Father; what *rejoycing* is there! With what endearing Kindness does the Divine Goodness entertain a miserable self-condemn'd Wretch, that sees his Error, is asham'd and griev'd for it, and returns with hearty Purpose to obey him better! 'Tis represented in the Parable, by the highest Expressions of Joy that were in those Eastern Countries; the Prodigal's Father *ran to meet him, fell on his Neck, and kissed him, commanded the best Robe to be put on him, and a Ring on his Hand, and Shooes on his Feet, and made merry with Feasting, and Musick, and Dancing.*

One would have thought, his wild Extravagancy should have met with rougher Entertainment, at least at *first* Interview; and *Reproof* have been given to his *Folly*, which brought him to so much *Misery*. But his Father's Compassion was above his Anger; and because he whom he thought was *dead* and *lost*, was *alive* again and *found*,

he forgot all *Reſentment*, and embraced him with Tenderneſs and Endearment. And thus it is with God when he ſees a Returning Sinner: Though the Sinner has indeed deſerved nothing but the Expreſſes of his Wrath and Indignation, and to be for ever *rejected* by him; yet he who gives freely to every man, and upbraideth not, and whoſe Mercy is over all his Works, *will not break the bruiſed Reed, nor quench the ſmoaking Flax*; but in infinite Goodneſs, not only give *Admittance* to, but receive with *joy* his Returning Prodigals.

And how can we enough praiſe and admire theſe Wonders of the Divine Compaſſion and Love, to poor miſerable and polluted Creatures! 'Tis an Abyſs that can never be fathom'd; our Thoughts are loſt and ſwallow'd up in the Contemplation of it, and *ſilent Admiration* does beſt expreſs that which *no Words* can reach.

And now, for a Concluſion of the whole; Since Vice and a *Lawleſs* Courſe of Living, is the Parent of ſo much Miſery, and has ſo many ill Conſequences cloſely attending it even in *this* World, and is, as the moſt *extravagant*, ſo the moſt *unhappy Prodigality*; and ſince the Miſeries of a wicked Life *here*, are but the Beginnings of unconceivable and *eternal* Sorrows *hereafter*; and ſince there is but *one* Cure for this great Evil, and nothing but ſincere *Repentance* will ſave us from Deſtruction; and ſince God is ſo infinitely good, as greatly to *deſire* we would Repent,

Repent, and return to our Obedience to him, and affords us all poſſible Helps in order to it, and greatly *rejoyces* to ſee a Sinner *penitent*, and receives him with the higheſt Expreſſions of *Tenderneſs* and *Love*; ſince all this is ſo, let us put off no longer, what, if we would be happy, muſt be done at laſt; but, with the greateſt Thankfulneſs, embrace the ineſtimable Favour of being again receiv'd into the Arms of our merciful God and Saviour. Let us immediately turn from every Evil Way; and that we may do ſo *effectually*, let us lay to heart how *vexatious*, and full of *Shame*, and utterly *unprofitable* a wicked Courſe of Life is, and how full of *Pleaſure* and unſpeakable *Delight* it is to advance from Grace to Grace, and to *perfect Holineſs in the fear of God*. And having *reſolv'd* well, and fully purpoſed our Return to the wiſe and good Government of our Heavenly Father, without Delay *do* as we have *reſolv'd*, and ariſe and go to our Father, and ſay, with all Humility and Confuſion of Face, and ſincere Contrition, *Father, I have ſinned againſt Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son*; and he whoſe Compaſſions never fail, will embrace us with the Arms of his Mercy, and forget our former Provocations, and take us to his Favour and Protection in this World, and at length make us Partakers of the Joys of his *Heavenly Kingdom*; where there ſhall be Rejoycing in his Preſence for our

Happineſs and Salvation, *Becauſe we were dead but are alive again, were loſt but are found.*

The PRAYER.

I.

ALmighty and moſt merciful Saviour, whoſe Government is directed by infinite Wiſdom, and proceeds in infinite Goodneſs, ſo that happy are they in whoſe Hearts are thy Ways, and that turn not aſide from thy Commandments; I confeſs, with Shame and Confuſion of Face, and I hope with a truly humble, penitent, and obedient Heart, that my vile Extravagancy and Impatience of thy bleſſed Reſtraint, and Fooliſh Deſire of Liberty, and following the Byaſs of my own brutiſh Inclinations, has hitherto been too notorious, and ſad have been the Conſequences of my Departure from thee. I have prodigally waſted thy Divine Grace, and turn'd it into Wantonneſs; I have ſquander'd away my Time in Vanity and Folly, which is the only Opportunity of ſecuring my Salvation; and, without Infinite Mercy, have forfeited my Reverſion of my Heavenly Inheritance; and all this, for what is below the Affections of a Rational Creature, and indeed

deed, as I have found by a coſtly Experience, no other than Vanity and Vexation of Spirit. And juſt it is, thou ſhould'ſt withdraw thy Grace, which I have ſo ſlighted and abuſed, and leave my Soul to ſtarve and famiſh, and dayly draw nearer and nearer to Eternal Death. But thou, O Father of Mercies, whoſe Compaſſions fail not, and who deſireſt not the Death of a Sinner, but rather that he ſhould repent and live; look graciouſly upon thy Returning Prodigal.

II.

I now am ſadly ſenſible of my deplorable Condition, and beg importunately, that I may ſo effectually hearken to the inward Shame and Remorſe that now I feel, for my paſt inexcuſable Madneſs and Folly, as that I may immediately return to my Obedience, to thee my infinitely wiſe and indulgent Parent, who art ready, I know, to ſtretch out thy Arms to receive me, and to whoſe preventing Grace I owe theſe pious Reſolutions of humbling my ſelf before thee. *Father, I have ſinned againſt Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son,* make me but as one of thy meaneſt Servants: I am now fully ſenſible, that one Day in thy Courts is better than a Thouſand, and had rather be a Door-keeper in the Houſe of my God, than to dwell in the Tents of Ungodlineſs. O continue to ſtrengthen theſe good Affections in me, and ſend out thy Light and thy Truth, even

even thy Bleſſed Spirit, that he may conduct me to thy Dwelling-Place, and ſecure my Retreat from the Kingdom of Darkneſs. O may I never defer what, if I would be happy, muſt be done at laſt, but inſtantly Return to thee, O Father of Compaſſions. Then ſhall I experience the happy Exchange of Miſery and Shame, for Joy unſpeakable and full of Glory; and inſtead of being the Triumph of Malicious Fiends in Hell, occaſion extraordinary Joy in the Preſence of thee my God, and thy Holy Angels, becauſe *I was dead but am alive again, was loſt but am found.* O Bleſſed God, verifie this Bliſs upon me, for thy Mercies ſake in Jeſus our Redeemer. *Amen.*

PARABLE

PARABLE XII.

Of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

Luke xvi. 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31.

There was a certain Rich Man, which was clothed in Purple and Fine Linnen, and fared ſumptuouſly every day;

And there was a certain Beggar *named* Lazarus, *which was laid at his Gate, full of Sores,*

And deſiring to be fed with the Crumbs which fell from the Rich Man's Table: moreover, the Dogs came and licked his Sores.

And it came to paſs that the Beggar died, and was carried by the Angels into Abraham's *Boſom: the Rich Man alſo died, and was buried.*

And

And in Hell he lift up his Eyes, being in Torments, and ſeeth Abraham *afar off, and* Lazarus *in his Boſom.*

And he cried and ſaid, Father Abraham *have mercy on me, and ſend* Lazarus, *that he may dip the tip of his finger in Water, and cool my Tongue, for I am tormented in this Flame.*

But Abraham *ſaid, Son remember, that thou in thy life-time receiv'ſt thy good Things, and likewiſe* Lazarus *evil Things: but now, He is comforted, and Thou art tormented.*

And beſides all this, between Us and You there is a great Gulf fixed, ſo that they which would paſs from hence to you cannot, neither can they paſs to us that would come from thence.

Then he ſaid, I pray thee therefore Father, that thou wouldeſt ſend him to my Father's Houſe;

For I have five Brethren: that he may teſtifie unto them, leſt they alſo come into this Place of Torment.

Abraham *ſaith unto him, They have* Moſes *and the Prophets, let them hear them.*

And he ſaid, nay Father Abraham, *but if one went unto them from the Dead they will Repent.*

And

And he ſaid unto him, if they hear not Moſes *and the Prophets, neither will they be perſwaded though One roſe from the Dead.*

THIS Parable ſeems to be deſigned to inform us of *Three* Things:

Firſt, That from a Man's Proſperous or Adverſe Condition in *this* World, there is no Judgment to be made concerning his Condition in the *next*; and that 'tis not ſeldom that the *Happineſs* Men meet with in *this* Life, is changed for *Miſery* in the *other*, and that *Affliction* here ends in Happineſs hereafter.

Secondly, That whatever Alteration is made in the State and Condition of the Soul, after its *Departure* from this World, it ſhall be from thenceforth for ever *unalterable*. And

Thirdly, That every Man may be ſufficiently *aſſur'd* of this that reads the Scriptures and powerfully enough inclin'd to *avoid* that Future *Miſery*, and ſecure his Eternal *Happineſs*; without any more *extraordinary* Ways of Conviction of the *Truth* of this, and *Perſwaſion* to act accordingly: And that thoſe who are not *ſatisfied* with what has been *hitherto* reveal'd in this Matter, will *never* be ſatisfied, though One ſhould come from the Dead to aſſure them of it. Of each of theſe Particulars I ſhall diſcourſe in their Order. The

The *first* thing this Parable informs us of is, that from a Man's prosperous or adverse Condition in *this* World, there is no Judgment to be made concerning his Condition in the *next*; and that 'tis not seldom, that the Happiness Men meet with in this Life, is chang'd for Misery in the other; and on the contrary, that Affliction Here ends in Happiness Hereafter. And this is express'd in the Parable by a Poor *Beggar*, that was full of Sores, and begg'd but the Crums that fell from a Rich Man's Table, his being carried *by Angels into Abraham's Bosom* when he died, or received into that Place of Happiness which is prepar'd for them that live and dye in the Faith and Fear of God, as *Abraham* did; while the Rich Man that was cloath'd in Purple and fine Linnen, and fared sumptuously every day, after *he* dy'd was *Tormented in the flames of Hell.*

'Twas the *Observation* and *Complaint* of *Solomon*, and might have been made (if it was not) long before, even from the Infancy of the World, that no Man knoweth either the Love or Hatred of God, by All that is here in *this* World before him; nay, that there are *Just* Men to whom it happeneth according to the Work of the
Eccl. 9. 1. *Wicked*, and *Wicked* Men to whom it happeneth according to the Work of the *Righteous*; *i. e.* That *Wicked* Men are often observ'd to be *prosperous* here, as if they were the *Favourites* of Heaven, and rewarded for their Vertue, and *Good* Men

cala-

calamitous and afflicted, as if they were *hated* of God, and puniſh'd for their great Impieties.

Job makes a very pathetical Complaint to this purpoſe, and was indeed, *himſelf* a deplorable *Inſtance* of what he then complained of; and he introduces what he would ſay with the greateſt Solemnity, *Mark me, and be aſtoniſhed*, ſays he *and lay your Hand upon your Mouth; Even when I remember I am afraid, and Trembling ſeiſeth my Fleſh. Wherefore do the Wicked live to become Old, yea are mighty in Power, and their Seed is eſtabliſh'd in their ſight with them, and their Off-ſpring before their Eyes? Whereas I*, might he have ſaid, (and queſtionleſs he alluded to it) I that have the Teſtimony of God himſelf, that there is none like me upon Earth, *a Perfect and an Upright Man, one that feareth God, and eſcheweth Evil*, am on a ſudden *ſtripp'd of all my Glory*, and my Children *All together* ſnatch'd from me, by a dreadful Accident, and my ſelf ſmitten with *ſore Boils*, from the Sole of my Foot unto my Crown, ſo that I am *weary of my Life*, and think I have reaſon to *curſe* the Day of my *Birth*. They ſpend their Days in *Wealth* and *Mirth*, and in a *Moment*, with a *quick* and *eaſie* Paſſage, go down to the Grave; whereas *I*, miſerable though innocent, am cloathed with *Worms*, and *Scabs*, and *Clods* of *Duſt*; my *ſighing* comes before my *Meat*, and my Roarings are *poured* out like the *Waters*, and

Job. 21. 5.

Job 19. 9.

and *I long* for Death, but it cometh not.

* Psal. 73. 21. Holy *David* * likewise, very feelingly complain'd of this, and the Prophet *Jere-*

†Jer. 12. 1. *my* †; and indeed, this so seemingly strange Method of Providence is the *Observation* of *every Man*, and the *Wonder* of *most*. And what *Conclusions* Men will be apt to draw from such Observations, is easie to imagine. The *Best* of Men will be apt to be *discouraged*, and tempted to say with *David*, *Verily, I have cleansed my Heart in vain, and wash'd my Hands in Innocency:* And as for *Sinners*, no doubt but they will be emboldened by it to *strengthen themselves in their Wickedness*; and either perswade themselves that their Actions are *not* so *odious* in the Sight of God as has been represented to them; or that, because they Thrive and *Prosper* more than *Better Men*, the Threats of Religion are but *Scare-Crows*, and because not *speedily*, shall *never* be inflicted; or, if there *be* another World, that they shall fare as well in *that* as they have done in this. And the more *indifferent* sort of Men, that are neither very Bad nor very Good, if they *prosper* here, will be apt to think it is an Argument of God's *Favour* to them, that they perform an acceptable Service to him *now*, and that it shall therefore be well with them hereafter; and if they do *not* Thrive, they will be inclined to follow the Course of those that *do*, as looking upon *Prosperity* to be an Argument of the *Favour and Blessing of God.*

But

But *All* this is *throughout* a great and *dangerous* Miſtake; and Worldly *Proſperity* is neither a certain Argument of God's *Favour* to Men in *this* World, or of their *Happineſs* in the *next:* Neither is *Affliction* a certain Sign of God's *caſting Men off* here, or a ſure Forerunner of *Eternal Miſery* hereafter; but frequently on the *contrary*, the *Good* are *calamitous* in this World, but received into *Abraham*'s Boſom in the other, and thoſe that are Proſperous and *Happy* here, too often have their Portion in the *Flames of Hell* hereafter.

Proſperity is in it ſelf indeed a *Bleſſing*, and promis'd as a Part of the Reward of Godlineſs; and accordingly, many good Men are Happy even here; and were *All* truly *good*, *All* would be Proſperous and *Happy*; for 'tis *Sin* only that makes the World *miſerable:* And on the other ſide, Affliction is *in it ſelf* a great Evil, and by *no means joyous but grievous*, and is always the Puniſhment of ſome *Offence*. But, oftentimes Worldly *Proſperity* is ſent as a *Curſe* rather than a *Bleſſing*, and is the Effect of God's Diſpleaſure, and the *only* Happineſs that ſome ſhall e'er enjoy. And *Adverſity* proves a great *Bleſſing*, and is an Expreſſion of God's Favour and Paternal Regard, the only Miſery ſome ſhall ever feel, and an Introduction to Eternal Happineſs; ſome, in mercy, being corrected *here* for their Faults, that they may eſcape the *everlaſting* Puniſhments of the other World, and others

fatted up here, as to a Day of *Slaughter*, and ſuffered (ſince they chooſe it) to have their Portion in *this* Life. As *Abraham* in the Parable, ſaid to the Rich Man, (who through the Exceſs of his Torment, begg'd that he would ſend *him* who was once a *poor Lazarus*, but then in a Place of *Happineſs*, to dip his Finger in Water, and come and cool his Tongue) *Son, remember that thou in thy Life-time receivedſt thy good Things, and likewiſe* Lazarus *his evil Things, but now, he is comforted and thou art tormented.*

And indeed, it is no wonder that it ſhould be ſo, and that *Proſperity* in *this* World ſhould ſo often end in *Miſery* in the *next*, and the *Afflictions* Men meet with *here*, be turn'd into *Happineſs hereafter*. For Worldly Proſperity, however *charming* it may *appear* to us, is a State ſo full of *Dangers*, ſo beſet with *Temptations to Vice*, ſo apt to divert Men from attending to Things of infinitely greater moment, and laying up a Treaſure in Heaven; and *Adverſity* on the contrary, though very *uneaſie* to *Fleſh* and *Blood*, yet is ſo apt therefore to *wean* Men from the World, and the fading Vanities of it, and make them out of Love with what is ſo *fickle* and uncertain, and full of Trouble; and is a State that *humbles* Men much, and increaſes *Devotion* and *Truſt in God*, and puts 'em upon Repentance, and a Deſire of enjoying that *Heavenly* Treaſure which ſhall never be taken from them:

That

That for a Rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, ſeems by far the greater Difficulty, and more likelihood is there of the *Calamities* of this World bringing a Man to that happy Place, than the proſperous Enjoyment of its *Pleaſures*. And accordingly ſays the Apoſtle, *Not many Rich, not many Mighty are called*, and *that Riches are a Temptation and a Snare, and drown Men in divers hurtful Luſts, and bring them to Deſtruction and Perdition*; and therefore exhorts Men to *count it all Joy when they fall into divers Temptations* or Afflictions.

The Uſe then, that we may make of this firſt Part of the Parable, is this; not to be *dejected* under *Adverſity*, as if *caſt off* by God, and utterly depriv'd of his Favour, nor *puff'd up* by *Proſperity*, as if *peculiarly dear* to Heaven; but in every State to make it our greateſt Care and Endeavour to ſecure our *main* Intereſt, and with Fear and Trembling, in the one Condition as well as the other, to work out our Salvation, by the Practice of that *Holineſs*, without which *no Man*, whether Rich or Poor, Calamitous or Proſperous, *ſhall ſee the Lord*; and *with* which *any* Man, in whatſoever Circumſtances he is *in this Life*, ſhall be ſure of a glorious Eternity in the *Preſence* and *Enjoyment* of his *Maker*. If Riches increaſe by honeſt Induſtry, and conſcientious Dealing, and prudent Management, we ought to eſteem it as a *Bleſſing*, and humbly thank God for it; but by no means ſhould we

ſet our Hearts upon them, nor grow high-minded, and conceited of our ſelves, as if greatly in Favour and Eſteem of God, and our Proſperity the Reward of our extraordinary Vertue; nor *deſpiſe* the Poverty of others, looking upon them as leſs *Holy* becauſe not ſo *proſperous* as we. Neither ſhould we grow vain and *luxurious*, or covetous and *ſordid*, but *make Friends, with the Mammon of Unrighteouſneſs*, and act like *good Stewards of the manifold Grace of God, being given to Hoſpitality*, and ready to relieve the Neceſſities of ſuch as are in want; remembring always, that *many* have *all* their Share of Happineſs in *this* Life, and while they dote immoderately upon the World, and place their chief Good in being proſperous here, forfeit their Glorious Reverſion hereafter: And always fearing leſt our Proſperity become a *Snare* to us in this Matter, and we turn it into a *Curſe* by our ill Uſe of it, and become ſuch *Fools*, as for the Gain of a little of the World, to loſe our Immortal Souls. What Comfort had the Rich Man in the Parable of all his former Proſperity, when he lay weltring in the Flames of Hell? All his *Purple* and Fine Linnen, and Sumptuous Fare, becauſe he abus'd 'em to Luxury and Exceſs, and grew negligent of laying up a Treaſure of *good Works* in *Heaven*; ended at length in the Want of a Drop of Water to cool his inflam'd Tongue.

If

If *Affliction* and *Poverty* ſhould be our Lot, 'tis then our Duty to endeavour to be *contented*, and not deſpond as if utterly *rejected* of God, but to remember that there is a *better* World, in which thoſe ſhall be unſpeakably and for ever happy, that are patient and *reſign'd* in this Vally of the Shadow of Death; that the Lord *loveth* whom he *chaſteneth*, and that if we comply with the *Ends* of his Correction, and amend under his Paternal Rod, *our light Affliction, which is but for a Moment, ſhall work for us a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory.* *Lazarus* in the Parable, we read, was miſerably poor, deſirous, though but of the *Fragments* that *fell from* the Rich Man's Table, and full of noiſom painful Sores, a ſad Spectacle both to himſelf and others; and yet, when he died, was carried up by *Angels* into *Abraham's Boſom*. 'Tis not a Man's *outward* Circumſtances that God reſpects, but the inward *Temper* of his *Mind*, and often makes his *outward* Condition *calamitous*, that his *Mind* may grow *better*; and if a Man be as poor and deſpicable in the Eye of the World as *Lazarus*, yet if he is of a contented *reſign'd* Soul, and make it his Endeavour to be *rich towards God*; he at length ſhall be fill'd with *Joy unſpeakable and full of Glory*, while many *rich* that have their Portion in *this* Life ſhall be *ſent empty away*. 1 Sam. 16. 7.

And thus much for the *firſt* thing this Parable informs us of, namely, that from a Man's proſperous or adverſe Condition in

this World, there is no Judgment to be made concerning his final Condition in the *next*.

The *second* thing it informs us of is, that whatever Change is made in the Condition of the Soul, after its *Departure* from this World, its State ſhall be from thenceforth for ever *unalterable*. For ſo in the Parable, when the Rich Man being in Torments, lifted up his Eyes, and ſaw *Abraham afar off*, and *Lazarus in his Boſom*, and cry'd and ſaid, *Father* Abraham *have Mercy on me, and ſend* Lazarus *that he may dip the Tip of his Finger in Water and cool my Tongue, for I am tormented in this Flame*; *Abraham*, after he had told him that *he* had in his *Life-Time* receiv'd his good things, and *Lazarus* his evil things, and that then there was a great and unexpected Change, and *Lazarus* was comforted and he tormented; he adds, moreover, that between him and them there was a *great Gulf fix'd*, ſo that thoſe which would paſs from thence to him could not, neither could any paſs from him to them.

What is meant by this *Gulf fixed* between Heaven and Hell, which hinders any *Comfort or Relief* coming from thence to that miſerable Place, or any Trouble or Annoyance from that Place to Heaven; ſo that the Condition both of the Wicked and the Righteous, remains unchangeably *happy* or *miſerable* reſpectively: Has been much controverted, eſpecially amongſt the School-

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men. But it tending to very little Edification to relate their Opinions, moſt of which are very frivolous; I ſhall only ſay what is the moſt receiv'd Opinion in our Church. By the *Gulf* fixed, we ſuppoſe is only meant God's irreverſible Decree that thoſe whoſe Wickedneſſes made them incapable of the Viſion and Enjoyment of God, and ſunk them down to Hell, ſhall for ever remain there without any Hopes of Comfort or Relief, and that the *Righteous* likewiſe ſhall be receiv'd into *Life* and Happineſs *everlaſting*, and ſuch as all the Powers of Hell ſhall never be able to leſſen or diſturb. And this methinks to any ſenſible Man, ſhould appear to be an Opinion the moſt reaſonable and moſt agreeable to the Holy Writings. Now here 'twill be worth our while, ſince the rich Man's Puniſhment is expreſs'd by his being tormented in Flame, and doom'd to be for *ever* ſo, to ſatisfie two Queries uſually put in this Caſe; as *firſt*, Why the Torments of Hell are expreſs'd by Flames and Burning? And *ſecondly*, How it can be conſiſtent with the Divine Juſtice to puniſh the *tranſient* Acts of Sin, with ſuch an *endleſs* Miſery?

To the *firſt* I return this Anſwer as to me the moſt ſatisfactory. Though I believe that at the general Conflagration, when the Heavens ſhall be ſhrunk up as a ſcorch'd Parchment, and the Elements melt with fervent Heat, and the World and all that's in it be burn'd up; though I believe that God will then take Vengeance of his Ene-

mies in *real* Flames of Fire, which ſhall for ever encircle and prey upon their Bodies: yet I think, *that* will be the *leaſt* Part of their Torment, and that the *Extremity* of it will conſiſt in the *inward* Trouble of their *Minds*; ariſing from an *impatient Appetite*, and continual *Thirſt* after that *Felicity*, which they know, through their *own Default*, they ſhall *never* come to *enjoy*. And that ſuch *vehement Deſires*, and the Paſſions conſequent upon the *diſappointment* of them, ſhould be call'd *Flames* and *Burning*, is no more than what is uſual in our common Manner of ſpeaking; and the Expreſſion of *fervent* and *ardent* Deſires, is often met with in the holy writings too, particularly, where *David* ſays, *My Soul breaketh out with the very fervent deſire it hath always to thy Commandments.* And Rage, and Fury, and Impatience, and the like, which attend *unſatisfied* Deſires, are likewiſe frequently attended with the Epithet of *Fire*; as every one muſt needs have obſerv'd.

Now, *Man* having an *innate uncontrolable Thirſt* after *Happineſs*, and which is always equally intenſe, and that to the higheſt Degree; when, (as the Puniſhment of his Rebellion againſt God, his fooliſh and wicked Choices here, his Purſuit after *lower* Good, and Neglect of the *Supreme*) he ſhall be *for ever* baniſh'd to an infinite Diſtance, not only from the *Fountain* of Happineſs, but from every *Stream* and *Participation* of it (which here below *cool'd* his Heat

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a litle, and for the *preſent* gratified that his Deſire) and yet the Appetite and *Thirſt* after it continuing as great as ever, and the Wretch withal ſenſible of the *utter Impoſſibility* of attaining it; and that, not ſo much as *one Drop* from that Fountain of Bliſs ſhall ever be given to allay his Thirſt, and cool his parch'd and inflam'd Tongue: His Deſire muſt for ever be to the higheſt Degree craving and *importunate* in *vain*; and being continually thus *diſappointed*, his *Impatience* will ſtill grow hotter and hotter, and his Remorſe for bringing this upon *himſelf*, turning to eternal *Rage* and *Fury*, and boyling up like Rivers of enflam'd Brimſtone, the *Fire* will be *everlaſting*. And what a Calenture, think we, will the whole Man be in; when *without* the fierceſt *material* Flames ſhall prey upon the *Body*, and hotter Fires *within* torment the *Soul*! And this Notion of the *Flames* of Hell, ſeems to me not obſcurely hinted, in the Rich Man's lifting up his Eyes in his Torment, and when he ſaw the happy State of *Lazarus* in *Abraham*'s Boſom, begging him to impart, though but *one Drop* of that Bliſs he enjoy'd, to cool *his* parched Tongue. His Deſire of that Happineſs was *in* the greateſt Degree of *Ardency*, and when he ſaw *Lazarus* in *Abraham*'s Boſom, *then* he cry'd out, Father *Abraham* have Mercy on me, for I am tormented in this *Flame*. Thus much for the *firſt* Query. To the *ſecond* I return this in Brief; That ſince *Sin* is the *greateſt Poſſible Evil*,

Evil, (it being a Violation of the *strongest* Tyes and *Obligations*, an Opposition and *Contrariety* to the *Supreme Good*, and in *no* Case *eligible*, as every considering Man must needs confess) it can't be too rigorously dealt with, even by the Infliction of the *greatest possible Punishment*; for there is the same Proportion between the *greatest Evil* and the *greatest Punishment*, as between a *lesser Evil* and a *lesser Punishment*: And therefore, unless we'll say, there can *never* be any Proportion between a Fault and its Punishment, I think we must own, there *is* Proportion *here*.

Now the Use we may make of this second Part of the Parable is this. That, since the Consequence of a Life of Wickedness, is so *dreadful* and *remediless* a Ruin, and the Wages of Sin this *eternal* Torment and Death; we would be above all things careful to *avoid* this Place of everlasting Torments, and make use of our Time and Opportunity while we have it, in providing for a *happy* Eternity. The End of every Man's *Life* is the Beginning of Eternity to *him*; then *Time* shall be no more, no more Space for Repentance and working out our Salvation, and after the great Change that Death will make in our Condition, no more Changes from thence forward for ever, no intermediate Purgatory to cleanse our remaining Filthiness; but as Death leaves a Soul, so shall Judgment find it, and an *irreversible* Sentence be pass'd upon it. And this

this great Truth can never be too often call'd to Remembrance; and there is so much of *Terror* in it to a wicked Liver, that whoever *thinks* at all, must needs be inclin'd by it to husband *well* this his *only* Opportunity of making himself for ever Happy, and immediately endeavour to clear himself from that Guilt, which, if he *dies* in, will make him for ever miserable, and that without the least *Alleviation*.

The *last* thing this Parable informs us of is, That every Man may be sufficiently assur'd of this great Truth, that reads the Scriptures; and powerfully enough inclin'd to avoid that future Misery, and secure his eternal Happiness, without any more *extraordinary* Ways of Conviction in this Matter, or Perswasives to act accordingly: And that those who are not satisfied with what has already been reveal'd of future Rewards and Punishments, in all Probability will *never* be satisfied, though one should *come from the Dead* to assure them of it.

This is expres'd in the Parable by the Rich Man's desiring (after he was sadly assur'd by *Abraham*, that there was no Remedy for *himself*) that he would *send Lazarus to his Father's House* (*for I have five Brethren, says he*) *that he may testifie unto them, lest they also come into this Place of Torment.* To this *Abraham* answers, *They have* Moses *and the Prophets, let them hear them.* But this would not satisfie the miserable Rich Man, *and he said, nay Father* Abraham, *but if one*

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went to them from the Dead they will repent. To this *Abraham* gives this final Anſwer; *If they hear not* Moſes *and the Prophets, neither will they be perſwaded though one aroſe from the Dead.* As if he had ſaid, There is all the Aſſurance given to Men by the Holy Writings of the Truth of theſe things, that any *reaſonable* Man can deſire; and the ſame Obſtinate and Atheiſtick Infidelity and Debauchery of Manners that makes Men disbelieve what the *Scriptures* affirm of *another Life*, would make them *ſtill* disbelieve it, though one aroſe from the Dead to aſſure them of it.

And if this was true *before* the Goſpel, when theſe things were but *darkly* reveal'd in compariſon of what they are *now*, and the *Jews* might *then* be ſufficiently aſſur'd of them by attending to the Writings of *Moſes and the Prophets*; it is a much more *confirm'd* Truth to us Chriſtians, the Scriptures of the *New* Teſtament aſſuring us of it in the moſt *plain* and *expreſs* Terms that can be: According to what the Apoſtle ſays, 2 *Tim.* 1. 8. that our Lord *has brought Life and Immortality to light by the Goſpel.*

And yet, ſome are ſo unreaſonable, as when we diſcourſe about Judgment to come, and the Rewards and Puniſhments of another Life, not to *tremble* at it as *Felix* did, but with perverſe Infidelity, queſtion the *Truth* of the thing, and ask us how we can be *ſure* it is and ſhall be ſo, and whether we have been told it by one that *came* from the other

other World, and has *experienc'd* what we ſay to be true: And that nothing leſs than ſuch a Proof ſhall ever make them believe it. And when they are urg'd with the Teſtimony *of* Moſes *and the Prophets*, and of the *Son of God* himſelf; they have the Confidence to laugh at this as an Invention of *Church-Men*, and no better than a *Religious Cheat*. They are not ignorant, they ſay, that the Writings which we affirm were divinely inſpir'd, do very plainly and expreſly aſſert, That there ſhall be a Judgment to come, and that every Man ſhall be rais'd from the Dead, and plac'd before the Almighty Judge, and conſign'd to eternal Happineſs or Miſery, according to what they have done in *this* Life, whether it be good or evil: But they deny the *Truth* of thoſe Writings, and conſequently the Reality of what they aſſert of this Nature. Our Buſineſs therefore muſt be to prove the Truth and Divine Authority of thoſe Holy Scriptures, and then 'twill follow, that he that ſtill disbelieves the Doctrine of future Rewards and Puniſhments, and is not inclin'd to live accordingly, will neither be convinc'd nor perſwaded in this Inſtance, though one *roſe from the Dead*

The Oppoſition Anti-ſcripturiſts make againſt the Holy Writings is in ſhort this. Either they will deny that thoſe Books were written by the Men whoſe Names they bear; or, if they are forc'd to grant *that*, they will deny the Truth of the *Matters of fact* which

which they ſet down, and endeavour to pick out Inconſiſtencies and Contradictions in their Relation; and, if beaten from that Poſt, they'll deny that the Writers were Men *divinely inſpired*, and affirm that the Doctrine they wrote was meerly the Product of their own Brains, and what ſtrange Occurrences they record of their Maſter Jeſus (as of *his* Reſurrection from the Dead, as an Argument that there ſhall be another Life after this is ended, and all Men *then* ariſe likewiſe, and be call'd to give account of their Works) that this and the like ſtrange Paſſages they record of Jeſus, ſuppoſing them to be *true*, were not done by a *Divine* Power, but by Art Magick and the Power of the Devil. And this, could it be made good, would be a ſhrewd Blow indeed, and all reveal'd Religion ſoon ſink into Ruine: But in ſhort (for to inlarge here, would far exceed the Bounds of a ſingle Sermon) a Chriſtian's Defence of the *Truth* and *divine* Authority of the Holy Writings may be this.

Firſt, Though ſome have *deny'd* that the Books of the Old and New Teſtament were written by the Men whoſe Names they bear, yet no Man ever yet could *prove* it; nay, on the contrary, they have been receiv'd as Genuine for many Hundreds of Years, and by Men of very different Religions and Perſwaſions, and that were bitter Enemies to the Religion there taught, and the Profeſſors of it, and would have been extreamly glad to have prov'd the *Whole a Forgery*

Forgery if they could. But since they *did* not, when 'twas so much for their Interest to have don't, 'tis plain they *could* not; and since they are, to this Day, approv'd by all Sorts of Religions as genuine, 'tis as much as can be said in the Case, and as much as can be said for any other Book in the World: And we must either throw aside *all* Books as *spurious*, or believe *this* which we call the *Bible*, to be *genuine*. Well, but though *this* may be true, yet they object further, that there is no Truth in the Matters of *fact* which these Men set down; and particularly that the whole Story of our Saviour's Life, and Death, and Resurrection, is a Falshood, and that their Relations are *contradictious*. But to this we may return, That though this has been by some Men said, yet it has never been *prov'd*; nay, on the contrary, several Heathen Writers, as *Pliny*, *Tacitus*, *Lucian*, *Suetonius*, and others of great Antiquity, quoted by *Grotius and †*Haetius*, have given in their Evidence as to the Matters of *fact* on the Christian Side; and though they have made it their Business to *vilifie* the whole Story of our Lord's Life and Death, yet they could *say*, much less *prove*, that there were *no* such Occurrences are as recorded by the Evangelists. And truly, the Evangelists are so *punctual* in all Circumstances of Time and Place, so *particular* in naming of Persons concern'd, and that were *Eye*-Witnesses of those Tranactions, and those too, Enemies as well as Friends, Jews and Heathens as

*De veritat. christ. Rel. Lib. 2.

† Demonstrat. Evangel. Propos. 3. prope Initium.

as well as Christians; and those Transactions were so *publick*, and in the Face of the *World*, and the Account of them was written so *soon* after they were *done*; that it would *then* have been a very easie Matter to have detected the Falshood of the *Whole*, or of any *Part* of the Story, if there had been any, and both Jews and Heathens were very much *concern'd* to do it if they could, and no doubt, they endeavour'd it to the utmost of their Power. But yet, after all, we find that neither then nor since, any thing of this Nature has been fastned upon these Writings, but rather the Truth of them has been approv'd by the Confession of the *Enemies* of Christianity, than which no better Argument can be produc'd for the Truth of any Ancient History in the World.

And as for the *Contradictions* and *Inconsistencies*, which, they say, are in the New Testament; though to Men *unlearn'd*, or else deeply *prejudic'd*, some things may at first sight seem to clash a little, yet upon a *closer* View of any *competent* and *unprejudic'd* Person, they will be found to be far from being *irreclaimable:* And these seeming Differences are likewise in things not *material*; in the *main* there is an unquestionable Harmony: Which, considering that *four* several Men were the Writers, and that they writ in different and *distant* Places, is no mean Argument, that what they so *punctually* and *agreeably* relate, is *true*. And indeed, those *little Differences* that are taken

Notice

Notice of, are rather an Argument for the *Truth* of their Relation, than any thing to the contrary; for had it been a *pack'd* Buſineſs, they would have been careful not to have differ'd in a *Title*. As for their *laſt* Reſerve, that ſuppoſing the Matter of *fact* to be *true* which they relate, yet thoſe ſtrange things that are recorded of *Jeſus*, might be perform-ed by *Art Magick* and the Power of the *Devil*: And that, what he or his Apoſtles have deliver'd by Way of Precept and Doctrine, was meerly the Product of their own *Brains*, and no Inſpiration of God: To this we may return in this Manner.

'Tis certain that the coming of *Jeſus Chriſt* into the World, was to *deſtroy* the Works and Kingdom of the Devil, as is evident from his caſting ſo many evil Spirits out of poſſeſs'd Perſons, and from their trembling at his Preſence, and crying out for Dread; and from his teaching ſo *Holy* and Heavenly a Religion, than which, nothing can more weaken his Infernal Kingdom: And to atteſt the *Truth* of this his Doctrine, and that he was ſent by *God* to teach it to the World, he wrought diverſe and very amazing *Miracles*, and thoſe highly *beneficial* ones too; ſuch as giving *Sight* to Men that were *born blind*, and curing long and deſperate Diſeaſes, and raiſing to Life thoſe that had been *dead*, and one of them four Days *buried*, and this only with a *Word* or with his *Touch*; which is Part of thoſe Matters of *fact*, ſet down by the Evangeliſts, which we before prov'd to be *true*. John 11; 17.

Now, can any Man in his Senſes think, that the Devil, were he *able*, would ſo far aſſiſt one that come on purpoſe into the World to *deſtroy* his Kingdom? 'Tis our Lord's own Anſwer to the fooliſhly malicious Phariſees, who, when they ſaw him work a ſtupendious Miracle upon one poſſeſſed with a Devil, both Blind and Dumb, inſomuch that the Blind and Dumb both ſpake and ſaw; objected preſently, *This Fellow caſteth out Devils by* Beelzebub *the Prince of the Devils. And Jeſus knew their Thoughts and ſaid unto them, every Kingdom divided againſt it ſelf is brought to Deſolation; and if Satan caſt out Satan, he is divided againſt himſelf, How then ſhall his Kingdom ſtand?* A *Demonſtration* this, that 'twas not by the Power of the *Devil* that he wrought his Miracles, but by the Power of *God*. For though deluded *Men* may be ſo fooliſh as to frame ſuch an *Objection*, the *Devil* is too *wiſe* to put the thing in *Practice*.

As for the other Part of what is objected, That what our Lord, and the Writers of the New Teſtament, the Evangeliſts and Apoſtles, have deliver'd by Way of *Precept* and *Doctrine*, was meerly the Product of their own Brains, and not the Inſpiration of *God*; I might only appeal to the Precepts and Doctrines *themſelves*, which are of ſo Exalted and Heavenly a Nature, and far above any thing, that either before or ſince was ever written by *Man*, that they *themſelves* will prove their Original to be Divine.

But

But there is a *farther* Proof of this, the many and great *Miracles* that were wrought, both by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, in Confirmation of the Doctrine they taught, and of their being commiſſion'd by God in an *extraordinary* Manner, to declare it as the Rule of their Obedience to *him*, and of their Converſation in the *World*. For, no reaſonable Man can think, that God would have ſo *wondrouſly* aſſiſted *thoſe* above all *other* Men, had they not been his peculiar Meſſengers, to make known his Will to Mankind.

And this, in ſhort, may be ſufficient to prove, to any reaſonable and unprejudic'd Man, the *Truth* and *Divine* Authority of the Holy *Scriptures*; and, conſequently, we have ſufficient Aſſurance, that there ſhall be another Life, when this is ended, wherein Men ſhall be for ever recompenc'd according to their Works: For this is very plainly and expreſly aſſerted in thoſe Writings, as every Man knows that has read them. And therefore 'tis as plain, that 'tis an unreaſonable *Obſtinacy*, and too great Love of the ſinful Enjoyments of *this* World, that makes Men deny their *Aſſent* to ſo great a Truth, and hinders them from being inclin'd by it, to lead a more *Innocent* and Holy Life. And the ſame Obſtinacy and Infidel Hardneſs of Heart, and Vileneſs of Manners, would make them *ſtill* disbelieve that there is a future State of Eternal Rewards and Puniſhments, according as Men live well or ill

here below, and *still* keep them from being perſwaded by it to Amendment, though one came to them *from the Dead* to aſſure them of it. For, what an eaſie Matter would it be for them to ſay, that the Apparition was but a *melancholly Fancy*, or a *Dream*, and regard it as if no *more*, and laugh at all things of that Nature, as too many now a-days are apt to do?

And he that will ſhut his Eyes againſt ſo much Reaſon, and Evidence, as there is, for the Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures, is Proof againſt any other Sort of Conviction whatever, even that of a Meſſenger ſent on purpoſe to him from the other World. For ſo our Lord in the Parable, *If they believe not* Moſes *and the Prophets* (we may add, and our Saviour, his Evangeliſts and Apoſtles) *neither will they be perſwaded, though one aroſe from the Dead.*

Wherefore, it becomes us all to be very careful, leſt the Spirit of *Unbelief* enter into us, and we grow ſo *blinded* by the Deceitfulneſs of Sin, as either not to *believe*, or not duly to *attend* to this great and ſtrongly *confirm'd* Truth, of the Certainty of *another* Life after *this*; and of the eternal Rewards and Puniſhments then to be awarded to every Man according to his religious or impious Behaviour here.

'Tis in vain to expect any further *extraordinary* Proof of what is *already* plainly declared by him, that cannot *be*, in thoſe Writings which we have all the Reaſon

in

in the World to believe, were written by his Divine Inſpiration. Let us rather ſo ſeriouſly conſider and *attend* to what is there reveal'd to us, as by thoſe Terrors of the Lord relating to a future Judgment, to be perſwaded to a ſincere Reviſal of our Ways, and deep Repentance of what we ſhall find to have been amiſs, and immediate Endeavours to do no more wickedly. Let us have a care how we are charm'd with the Pomps and Vanities of this World, as if here were our Happineſs and our Heaven, and we look'd for no other Life when this is done; and let us be cheifly employ'd in making Proviſion for that other *endleſs* Life which will ſucced this, that *then* we may be *happy*, when, if we are *miſerable*, we ſhall be *always* ſo. Remembring that the Rich Man in the Parable, who in *this* Life receiv'd his *good things*, and was wholly intent upon the Enjoyment of them, and look'd no further, made no Proviſion for what was to be hereafter in that other State; after he died was tormented in the Flames of Hell, and *wanted a Drop of Water to cool his Tongue*: While the poor, deſpis'd, and ſeemingly miſerable *Lazarus*, that begg'd for the Crumbs which fell from his Table, and was taken little Notice of by any but the Rich Man's Dogs; becauſe his Poverty made him Religious, and think of and provide for better things in an everlaſting World, was, when he died, conducted by *Angels into* Abraham's *Boſom*, that Place of Eternal Happi-

neſs, Reſt and Peace, which is prepar'd for the Righteous.

Theſe things, if we conſider throughly and ſeriouſly, there will be no need of one from the Dead, either to *convince* us of the *Truth* of them, or to *perſwade* us to an immediate *Repentance*, that we may eſcape that Place of Eternal *Torment*, reſerv'd for the *obſtinately wicked*, and be receiv'd into that happy State which ſhall for ever crown the pious Endeavours of the *Good*. Wherefore, for the future, *may we all ſo meditate upon theſe things, and give our ſelves ſo intirely to them, that, through God's gracious Aſſiſtance, our profiting may appear in all things*?

The PRAYER.

O God, infinitely wiſe and Good, the Diſpoſals of whoſe Providence here below, though always for the beſt, are yet often the Cauſe of Wonder to us Mortals; eſpecially in the Proſperity of the Wicked, and the Afflictions of the Righteous: Teach me the Wiſdom, I beſeech thee, to look beyond this World for Happineſs, and never to make vain Concluſions of thy Favour or diſpleaſure to my ſelf or others, or concerning mine or their Condition in the other World, from the Circumſtances of this our preſent Life: But rather in all things to acknowledg thy Providence to be good and juſt, and be careful to ſecure my Duty in whatſo-

ever

ever Station thou ſhalt pleaſe to place me. Grant that in Proſperity I may be Humble, Thankful and Charitable; in Adverſity Contented, and reſign'd under thy Paternal Rod; and may make that good Uſe of every Condition which thou deſigneſt I ſhould, and carefully avoid the Snares of each; and make it my great Endeavour, whilſt I continue here below, to ſecure a happy Eternity in the World of Spirits, where my Condition, whatever it then ſhall be, will be unchangeable. And, may my Belief of future Eternal Rewards and Puniſhments, be daily more and more ſtrengthned and confirmed, by a ſerious and unprejudic'd Attention to the plain Aſſurance thou haſt given me of it in the Holy Scriptures; ſo as not to be vainly deſirous of any more extraordinary Evidence in this matter, but believing theſe great Truths without wavering. Grant that I may immediately endeavour to reform my Life before it be too late: That ſo, when I go hence, I may be receiv'd into *Abraham*'s Boſom, the happy Portion of the Faithful, and eſcape the Place of endleſs Torment, prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels. Grant this, O Gracious God, for Jeſus Chriſt his Sake.

PARABLE XIII.

Of the Importunate Widow.

Luke xviii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

And Jesus spake a Parable to this End, that Men ought always to pray and not to faint;

Saying, there was in a City a Judge which feared not God, neither regarded Man.

And there was a Widow in that City, and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine Adversary.

And he would not for a while; but afterwards he said within himself, Though I fear not God, neither regard Man;

Yet because this Widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

THE Force of this Parable, in order to the perswading to a constant and importunate Devotion, lies in this, That if *Importunity* will prevail with a sinful Man, that neither fears God, nor has any Compassion

Compaſſion for the Miſeries of his Fellow-Creatures, to grant Petitions offer'd to him: How much *more* prevalent will it be, with the infinitely *good God*, to relieve the Neceſſities of ſuch as devoutly and earneſtly implore his Help? And to the ſame Senſe is another Parable, *Luke* 11. 16. *Which of you ſhall have a Friend, and ſhall go to him at Midnight, and ſay unto him, Friend, lend me three Loaves, for a Friend of mine in his Journey is come unto me, and I have nothing to ſet before him; and he from within ſhall anſwer and ſay, Trouble me not, the Door is now ſhut, and my Children are with me in Bed, I cannot riſe and give thee. I ſay unto you, Though he will not riſe and give him becauſe he is his Friend, yet, becauſe of his Importunity, he will riſe and give him as many as he needeth.* And the Application of this Parable is, *Ask and it ſhall be given you, ſeek and ye ſhall find, knock and it ſhall be open'd unto you.* And the Reaſon why our Lord applies the firſt Parable to God's *certainly avenging his Elect, which cry Day and Night to him, though he bear long with them*; I ſuppoſe to be (with Dr. *Hammond*) the great Diſcouragements his Diſciples were then under, by reaſon of the Malice of the Jews, which made it neceſſary for him to keep up their Spirits by aſſuring them, that God's not *immediately* hearkening to their Prayers by manifeſtly appearing in their Cauſe to protect *them* and puniſh their *Enemies*, was no Argument that he *wholly diſregarded* them, but that if they

they perſiſted in their grateful Importunity, he would at length anſwer their Deſires. For, if Importunity be ſo prevalent even with *Wicked* Men, how much more will it be ſo with the God of Mercy and Compaſſion?

'Tis plain then, the chief Deſign of theſe Parables, though differently worded and apply'd, is to enforce the Neceſſity of *frequent and earneſt Prayer*; and therefore, without any farther minute Explication of them, (they being ſo plain, that they neither *need* nor will *bear* it) I ſhall addreſs my ſelf to diſcourſe upon what is couch'd under them, and endeavour to evince the Neceſſity of Praying *frequently*, and with Earneſtneſs and *Importunity*.

That *Prayer*, or a Liberty of making our Requeſts known unto God, is a Privilege and Happineſs ineſtimable, no one that conſiders the Nature of *God* and the Nature of *Man* can queſtion. The *latter*, a poor *dependent* Creature, helpleſs and weak, ſhort-ſighted and ignorant, full of Wants and Neceſſities, obnoxious to innumerable evil Accidents, of unruly Paſſions and Affections, the Hate and Envy of the Spirits of Darkneſs, ſtrongly prone to what is Evil, and *averſe* to what is Good; the *former*, a Being of infinite *Fullneſs* and Perfection, infinitely *wiſe*, and *powerful*, and *good*, the Maker of the Univerſe, whoſe is the whole Creation, and to whom, every Thing that *is obeys*. Now, that this indigent helpleſs Crea-

Creature ſhould have *ſuch* a Patron to make his Wants known to, a Patron ſo inexhauſtibly *full*, ſo *wiſe*, ſo *able*, and ſo *willing*, to *direct* and *guide* him, to *ſupport* and *comfort* him, to *protect* and *defend*, to *relieve* and *ſuccour* him; to have Freedom of Addreſs to *ſuch* a Patron as this, is, without all doubt, a Privilege and Favour that no Man can ſufficiently eſteem.

And yet, (ſo unaccountably ſtupid and thoughtleſs are Men for the Generality) What is more neglected, nay *deſpis'd*, than this invaluable Privilege! As if they were *full*, and had need of Nothing, or were *ſelf-ſufficient*, and could be their own Helpers; when indeed, they are *wretched and miſerable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*

In pity to this our *doubly* Forlorn Condition, our Bleſſed Saviour, the God of Compaſſions, that if poſſible we might receive the full Benefit of ſo great a Favour and Divine Condeſcention; has made this *Privilege* become our *Duty*, and bound it upon us by the *Commands* of his Holy Inſtitution; *encourag'd* our Practice of it by his own *Example*, and by Himſelf and his Apoſtles left ſuch Directions for the more *effectual* Performance of it, that every Man for the Future might be without Excuſe, if he either Pray'd *not at all*, or to no *purpoſe*.

Among which Directions, the *Importunity* recommended in this Parable, and in that other before-mention'd ſo near of Kin to it, is greatly to be regarded; as that which

which will certainly, if other Requiſites are not wanting (for there are others) bring down a Bleſſing. But becauſe there are other Things requir'd both by our Lord and his Apoſtles, in order to our Praying ſucceſsfully, beſides Importunity; I think it will not be amiſs, if I diſcourſe more *largely* of this great and *concerning* Duty of Prayer, than I could do if I ſtrictly confin'd my ſelf to the Bounds of this Parable; and endeavour theſe three Things.

Firſt, To prove that Prayer is not only an ineſtimable *Privilege*, but the *Duty* of every Chriſtian.

Secondly, To ſhew how *far* the Obligation to this Duty does *extend*. And,

Thirdly, What are the neceſſary *Requiſites*, that this Duty may be perform'd *ſucceſsfully*.

First, Prayer is not only the *Privilege*, but the *Duty* of every Chriſtian.

Mat 26.41 *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation*, was Our Lord's Charge to *Peter*, and the two Sons of *Zebedee*, in the Garden of his Agony; and not to them only, but to all others that are in their Circumſtances, (*i. e.*) in great Danger of being tempted, and weak and unable of Themſelves to make Reſiſtance; and that, God knows, we all of us are, and therefore to all of us is this Command directed. *Ask and ye ſhall have, ſeek and ye ſhall find, knock and it ſhall be open'd unto you*, ſays the ſame Bleſſed Jeſus immediately after one of the

the Parables before mention'd; as if he had said, God will be gracious and relieve your Necessities, but 'tis upon Condition you will lay your Wants before him, and implore his Help; according to that of S. *James*, chap. 4. ver. 2. *Ye have not, because ye ask not.* In the Sixth of *Matthew* our Lord has set us a *Pattern* of Prayer, and commanded us to use it, *When ye pray, say Our Father*, &c. And he spake the Parable we are now discoursing on, to this very purpose, *That men ought always to pray, and not to faint*; and he himself was our *Example* too in this Matter, and *continued whole Nights in Prayer unto God*; and his Example in Things within our reach, as assiduous Prayer is, we are upon innumerable Accounts obliged to follow.

And as our Lord, so his Apostles bind this upon us as our *Duty*. Thus S. *Paul* bids us *in every thing by Prayer and Supplication with Thanksgiving, to let our Requests be made known unto God*; and to *continue in Prayer*, and *watch in the same with all Perseverance, and to Pray every where, and without ceasing.* Phil. 4. 6. Col. 4. 2. Eph. 6. 18. 1 Tim. 2. 8. 1 Thes. 5. 17.

The Duty, we see, is sufficiently bound upon us by our Holy Religion: 'Tis plain and express, and must as carefully be observ'd as any other Command; so *sollicitous* is our good God for our Happiness, as by all Means to bring us to the Practice of what will be so highly *beneficial* to us: And where the *Love* of a Thing, upon Account of its

own Excellency, and Serviceableneſs to our *Selves*, will not attract our numbred ſenſeleſs Souls, there to *goad* and prick us on, and even *force* us to it, by Threats of Puniſhment if we refuſe. Good God! That Men ſhould need *haling* to Felicity! And that *God* ſhould be ſo deſirous of it, as thus to take all Meaſures to bring us to it! O the unaccountable *Stupidity* of Man, and the unſearchable Riches of the Goodneſs of God!

And what a miſerable Wretch is he, unnatural to Himſelf, and Ungrateful to his God, who by his Obſtinacy ſhall fruſtrate ſo great Tenderneſs of God as this, and break through ſo many Obligations to his own Ruin! and with Deviliſh Pride and Sullenneſs ſtarve and famiſh his Soul, rather than Pray to God to Relieve and Help him! How many of thoſe that call Themſelves Chriſtians are thus wretchedly miſerable, God and their own Conſciences know beſt; but let not any Man be deceiv'd; 'tis not only a *Privilege* now, but is become a *neceſſary Duty*, and by the Neglect of it we ſhall not only loſe the Benefit conſequent upon the Peformance of it, but receive the Puniſhment due to the Breach of the Laws of God; which, in all probability, will be ſo much the more *ſevere*, as the *Benefit* would have been *great*: For nothing is more provoking, than to have great Favours and Condeſcenſions (ſuch as is this) ſlighted and deſpis'd. And thus much may ſuffice

to

to prove, that Prayer is not only the *Privilege*, but the *Duty* of every Chriſtian. I proceed in the

Second Place, to ſhew, How *far* the Obligation to this Duty does *extend*. Our Lord in the Proeme to this Parable, ſays, That Men ought *always* to pray; and S. *Paul*, 1 *Tim.* 2. 8. ſays, *I will that Men pray every where*, ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ, in every Place; and *Epheſ.* 6. 18. ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ, upon every Occaſion, with every Opportunity; and 1 *Theſſ.* 5. 17. he joyns both together, and commands that we pray Ἀδιαλείπτως, without Intermiſſion. So that 'tis a Duty that extends to all *Times* and *Places*, to all *Seaſons*, and *States* and Conditions of Life; and as at all Times we ſtand in *need* of the Favour and Bleſſing, the Protection and Support, the Mercy and Forgiveneſs of God; ſo 'tis at all Times our Duty to beſeech it of him. But this will need a farther Explication.

For this Praying without *ceaſing* or Intermiſſion, cannot be underſtood in the ſtricteſt Senſe, as if there were to be no Ceſſation of the *Act*, for that would be impoſſible; and there are many other Things that we are as much oblig'd to, which will take up great Portions of our Time. Many Neceſſities of Nature there are that muſt be adverted to and ſupplied, many honeſt Employments that muſt be follow'd, many other Chriſtian Graces that muſt be exerciſed, and ſometimes even innocent *Recrea-*

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tions must take place; there being, as *Solomon* says, *a Time for all Things, a Time to Weep and a Time to Laugh, a Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance. This*, as well as other *Affirmative* Commands, does, *Obligare semper*, as the Schools distinguish, but not *pro semper*; that is, There is no Time, or Season, or Place so exempt, but that in due Circumstances we are oblig'd to this Duty, but it does not oblige as *Negative* Commands do, to *every Moment*, without any Exception. There is no Minute of our Life, but the Commands, *Thou shalt do no Murder, Thou shalt not commit Adultery, Thou shalt not Steal*, and the like, do oblige us to observe them; but there are very many Portions of our Time wherein such Precepts as these, *Be Afflicted, and Mourn, and Weep*, and the contrary to it, *Rejoyce evermore*, and *Pray without ceasing*, and the like, neither do nor can oblige. To keep our Minds in an habitual Frame and apt Disposition for the Performance of these Duties in proper Circumstances, is all that is expected from us. But more particularly, to Pray *always*, or every where, and without ceasing, is to do these Three Things:

First, 'Tis to be very frequent in offering up pious *Ejaculations*, or short *mental* Prayers, as Occasion shall offer, which will be very often; and the most usual and common Occurrences of Life may be improv'd to this sort of Devotion, without the least Hindrance or Encroachment upon any other Employ-

Employments. In the Field, in the Shop, in the Bed when Sleep departs, in a Journey, every where, and at all Times, this may be done, without Expence of Time, without *Shew* or Obſervation; and is a Service highly acceptable to God, and keeps the Mind in an excellent Frame and Temper, and is out of Danger of being polluted by *Hypocriſie* and other baſe and little Ends; which too often mingle with our more *ſet* and *publick* Prayers. And the Soul may more *vigorouſly* dart forth theſe ſhort Accidental Breathings, and ſtorm Heaven more ſucceſsfully by theſe quick lively Efforts, than by whole Armies of Words and Legions of long-breath'd Petitions, which are rather apt to *tire* the Soul, and rebate the Edge of her Devotion.

Of this Nature is the Prayer which our Lord has taught the *Church*; the *whole* far from *long*, and the *particular* Petitions very *ſhort*, but withall *full* and *comprehenſive* to Admiration: In Imitation whereof, have the wiſe Compilers of our Liturgy divided the Service into ſhort *Collects*, and compriſed their Senſe in as few Words as is poſſible; that ſo the Mind may be more *intent* and recollect, and have time to *breath* as 'twere between each of them, and return with *freſh* Vigour and Spirit to the ſucceeding parts; according to our Lord's expreſs Advice, *Uſe not vain Repetitions when ye pray*; and that of the Wiſe Preacher, *Eccl.* 5. 2. *Be not raſh with thy Mouth, and let*

not thine Heart be haſty to utter any Thing before God, for God is in Heaven, and thou upon Earth, therefore let thy Words be few. And this way of *Ejaculatory* Devotion comes very near to *Praying without ceaſing* in the ſtricteſt Senſe, and much reſembles that Heavenly Employment of thoſe, *Rev.* 4. 8. *Who reſt not Night and Day, ſaying Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.* But,

Secondly, To Pray always, is never willingly to omit the Morning, and Evening, and Noon-day Returns, of our more ſet and ſolemn private Addreſſes to the Throne of Grace; the Morning and Evening eſpecially, which is the leaſt Homage we can pay to the Almighty, and which are Seaſons the moſt of all in our power, to employ as we think fit.

The Morning and Evening Sacrifice was conſtant among the *Jews*; the Fire was ever Burning upon the Altar, and never was ſuffer'd to go out. *David* pray'd Morning and Evening, and at Noon, and God heard his Voice; yea, ſeven Times a Day did he praiſe him becauſe of his Righteous Judgments: and *Daniel* made his Petition three Times a Day towards *Jeruſalem*, as the *Jews* Cuſtom was.

The Morning and Evening are the two *Extremes* of the Day, and the *Noon* is like an *intermediate* Link between them, that is joyned to both, and ſo makes one continued Day; ſo that, he that prays *Morning* and

and *Evening*, and at *Noon*, may not improperly be ſaid to ſpend the *Day* in Prayer, and to continue *inſtant* in it. And how very fitting it is, that theſe Returns ſhould without any wilful Intermiſſion be obſerv'd, will ſoon appear to any one that *conſiders*.

For Firſt, As for our private *Morning* Devotions, our Preſervation from the Dangers of the Night paſt, God's careful watching over us while we ſlept, and lengthning out our Opportunity for Repentance, and making Proviſion for a Better Life; ought certainly to bring us upon our Knees, in humble *Adoration* of that Good God *in whom we live, and move, and have our Beings*; in humble *Submiſſion to his Providence* for the Future, and devout *Oblation* of our whole *Selves* and our whole *Time*, to *His* Service, who has continu'd to us *Life, and Health, and all Things*. And, ſince all our Sufficiency is of God, and we can do no good Thing, nor ſo much as think a good Thought, *without* him; to beg his Bleſſed Preſence with us, That he would work in us to will and to do according to his Good Pleaſure; That he would guide and protect us, and bleſs and proſper our honeſt Undertakings, and ſtill continue to watch over us for Good; That we may be undefil'd by the Temptations of the Day, and look back with Comfort upon our Actions, when we caſt up our Accounts at Night.

2. As for our *Mid-day* Devotions, becauſe we are then in the midſt of the Dan-

gers and Temptations of the Day, beset on every side with Allurements to do Evil; 'twill highly concern us *afresh* to beg the Divine Aid and Support, that we may stand upright. If we have pass'd securely the former part of the Day, it becomes us to pay our humble Acknowledgments to our Divine Guardian and Guide; and if we have *fallen*, it becomes us with Shame and Sorrow to confess our Vileness, and deprecate God's Anger, and beg his Grace, that we may be more circumspect the *Remainder* of it. And besides, the Works of the Creation, the wonderful Order of the Universe, the Variety, Beauty, and Usefulness of the Creatures, and the plentiful Provision God hath made for all our Necessities; will then be very proper to engage our Thoughts, and will minister abundant Matter for Devotion, and be very apt to fill our Breasts with Holy Breathings and Aspirations towards that inexhaustible Fountain of Beauty and Perfection, and Power infinite, who by his Word spake all this into Being.

3. And for Prayer at *Evening*, our *Protection* from the many evil Accidents, and the many great *Blessings* of the Day past; the *Miscarriages* likewise and *Failures* of it, if no *worse*, and the Dangers of the approaching Night, are sufficient Motives and Engagements to renew our devout Addresses to the Almighty.

And as *private* Prayer ought to be thus constant, and without wilful Intermission;

so,

ſo, and more eſpecially, no Opportunity of praying to God in the publick Congregation ſhould be omitted: For, this Attendance upon the *publick* Worſhip of God, is that which is chiefly and primarily intended by the Apoſtles in what they wrote about this Duty of Prayer. Moſt part of the firſt Epiſtle to the *Corinthians*, is ſpent in giving Directions for the more decent Management of the *publick* Service of God; and 1 *Tim.* 2. 8. the Command of Praying ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ *in every place*, and that *Epheſ.* 6. 18. ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ *upon every opportunity*, muſt primarily relate to the *publick*, as any capable Perſon may perceive, by conſidering the Context.

And accordingly, thoſe Converts made by S. *Peter*, Acts 2. 42. *Continu'd ſtedfaſtly in the Apoſtles Doctrine and Fellowſhip, and in breaking Bread and in Prayers*; and v. 46. *They continu'd daily in the Temple with one Accord*; and on the Day of *Pentecoſt* we find them *all with one accord in one place*, Acts 2. 1. And thus it was in all Ages of the Church, till Iniquity abounded, and the Love of many began to wax cold. But methinks, the Conſideration of the great *Advantages* of theſe *Publick* Devotions above the Private, ſhould have ſome Influence upon us, in order to our more conſtant Attendance at the places of Divine Worſhip; for our Lord has expreſly promis'd his peculiar Preſence there, and that the Prayers there offer'd ſhall be ſucceſsful. Thus *Matt.*

18. 19. *I say unto you*, says he, *that if two of you shall agree on Earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in Heaven; for where two or three are gather'd together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them.* The *Church* is an Emblem of *Heaven*, and the *Congregation* of the *General Assembly of the First-born which are written there*; whose happy Employment is, to Admire, Adore, and Extol the Infinite Mercy and Majesty of God, for ever and ever; and as there, so here, the Devotion of others will raise our Affections, and their Zeal and Fervor quicken our Devotion. To which purpose is that of the Apostle *Heb.* 10. 24, 25. *Not forsaking the Assembling of your selves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and provoking to Love and Good Works*, by pious Example and devout Behaviour in the Church. And the *Blessing* pronounc'd by the Minister at the Close of those publick Offices, was in the Primitive Times thought a Thing of no mean Regard, whatever low Thoughts Men now-a-days may have of it.

To this Head of *Publick* Prayer, may be reduc'd the Assembling of a *Family* together to offer up their joint Petitions to God; whether by the chief of the Family, or by some Minister of Religion, if present: And this has been a Practice of very long standing, and is of excellent Use.

It keeps a Family in a ſerious Senſe of Religion; it accuſtoms Youth to it betimes, and is an excellent Example to Children and Servants, who are apt to mark and imitate their Parents and Maſters Steps more than they are aware of; and Young People will be inclin'd to think, there is ſomething more than ordinary in Religion, when they ſee thoſe, of whoſe Prudence and Experience they have an Opinion, ſo ſeriouſly ſet about it.

The Returns of theſe Family-Devotions at the *Beginning* and *Cloſe* of the Day, ought not without good Reaſon to be omitted; for they naturally tend to make People more *Induſtrious* and *Juſt* in their Dealings in the World, as keeping up in their Minds a ſenſe of their being in the Sight and Preſence of a Juſt and Holy God, and to prevent Abundance of Folly and Levity, and Looſneſs of Manners, and make the Days Sober and Honeſt, and the Nights Innocent and Chaſte. And this appears evidently to be true, in the great Difference any Man may diſcern between Families where this Holy Cuſtom *is*, and is *not* obſerv'd; Idleneſs and Lazineſs, Pilfering and Cheating, Swearing and Lying, Lewdneſs and Intemperance, and Debauchery of all ſorts, generally where 'tis neglected; and good Order, Modeſty, and Sobriety, Diligence and Faithfulneſs where 'tis obſerv'd: For, it tending ſo much as it evidently does, to the making Men *Good Chriſtians*; it conſequently, muſt needs tend

to the making them good in every Relation.

Theſe ſolemn Family Devotions, are likewiſe a very good preparation for the better performance of the more publick Offices in the great Congregation. For they tend to create that habitual Serioufneſs and Recollection of Thought, which our *Publick* Prayers command, and without which, we ſhall offer but the Sacrifice of Fools. The more Men are affected with the Prayers of a Family at home, the more ſacred and awful will the *publick* Service in the Houſe of God appear to them; if attentive and devout *there*, much more ſo *here*; and the more they feel the Comfort of joint Devotions in their own Houſes, the more deſirous will they be of, and the more benefited and refreſhed by, the Harmony of a full Choir of Saints in the Holy Temple.

I'm afraid this pious Cuſtom is now-a-days too much neglected; ſome grudging to take ſo much *Time* from their *other* Employments as this Duty requires; and others, on Evenings eſpecially, making themſelves *unfit* for the Performance of it by *tarrying long at the Wine, and enflaming themſelves with Strong Drink*; and ſome truly, thinking it too *preciſe* and *puritanical* a Thing, to be practis'd now-a-days. But theſe *laſt* ſhould have a Care how they throw ill Names upon what our Religion has made our *Duty*, and what has all along been obſerv'd by the beſt Men in the World; and they would do well to conſider thoſe Words

of

of our Lord, *Mark* 8. 38. *Whoſoever ſhall be aſham'd of me and of my Words in this adulterous and ſinful Generation, of him alſo ſhall the Son of Man be aſham'd, when he cometh in the Glory of his Father and of the Holy Angels.*

Is it a fitting Reaſon, that a thing ſo excellent as this ſhould be deſpis'd and diſus'd, becauſe thoſe that in other Matters diſſent from us, are ſo careful to obſerve it? Let their Piety in this Inſtance, rather ſhame us into Amendment, that we may be behind them in no Good Work, and leave them no Occaſion of Caviling and making Objections againſt our Church, by reaſon of the careleſs *indifferent* Religion of ſome that are of our Communion. In particular, this Neglect of *Family-Devotions* is often thrown in our Teeth; and the beſt way to take off the Aſperſion, is heartily to ſet about the Practice of the Duty.

'Tis our great Happineſs, were we duly ſenſible of it, that we are Members of the moſt Primitive Church in the World, and the greateſt Encouragers of True Piety and Religion; and methinks we ſhould be very careful, had we any Love for this Church, any deſire that it ſhould flouriſh and proſper, not to diſparage it by our ſo *diſagreeable* Converſation. Other Sects and Parties we ſee extraordinary diligent to gain Honour and Reputation, by all means, to their Profeſſion, that their Antagoniſts may diſcover no Flaw or Indecency, no Breach of the Orders

Orders and Cuſtoms they have embrac'd; while we, that have the beſt *Cauſe*, are generally the worſt *Managers* of it. For Shame, let us at length grow *wiſe*, and *live up* to what we *profeſs* in this and every other Particular; and tranſcribe the excellent Rules of our Church, in our Converſation; let us *act* like true Sons of the *Church of England*, as well as *talk* as ſuch; and then no Doubt but God and his Truth will prevail. *We* are as a City built upon a Hill, a Light ſet in an eminent Place, many envious Eyes are upon us, and rejoyce to ſee our Taper burn dim, and our City defil'd by Wickedneſs and Impurity; wherefore we ſhould be the more careful to *trim* our Lamps, and purge out our Stains, and ſhine brightly, in the midſt of a crooked and perverſe Generation: That theſe Men ſeeing our good Works, may at length glorifie our Heavenly Father, by a Hearty Union and Communion with us, and return to the Fold which they have ſo groundleſly deſerted.

As for ſuch as grudge *Time* for this Duty of praying in their Families, let them conſider, whether they can indeed improve it more to their *Advantage*; whether the Gain of a little Money is to be compar'd to having the Bleſſing of God, and the Guidance and Protection of his good Providence: And whether their Time was not chiefly given them to worſhip God in, and to make Proviſion for another World.

And as for ſuch as make themſelves unfit for

for this Holy Duty, by *Night Revels* and *Intemperance*, they can't but be ſenſible that that's a very ill Excuſe, ſuch as they ſhould bluſh and be aſham'd of, and a Fault which it highly concerns them ſpeedily to amend; remembring that Drunkards are in that black Liſt, of ſuch as *ſhall not enter into the Kingdom of Chriſt and of God*, 1 Cor. 6. 10.

Having thus ſhewn that Prayer is not only the *Priviledge*, but the *Duty* of a Chriſtian, and how *far* the Obligation to this Duty does *extend*, I proceed to the

Third and *laſt* thing to be done, which is, to ſhew what is requir'd in order to the *effectual* Performance of this Duty; and what St. *Paul* ſays, 1 *Tim.* 2. 8. added to the *Importunity* recommended in the Parable we are now diſcourſing upon, will doubtleſs make our Prayers to be *availing*. The Apoſtles Words are theſe, *I will that Men pray every where, lifting up Holy Hands without Wrath and doubting*; and of theſe Requiſites I ſhall firſt diſcourſe, and then of *Importunity*.

Firſt, If we would be accepted at the Throne of Grace, we muſt lift up *Holy* Hands. The Word in the Original ſignifies pure and undefil'd, and 'tis an Alluſion to the Cuſtom of the Jews, who conſtantly us'd the Ceremony of *waſhing* before they pray'd; which was intended to ſignifie the Neceſſity of a *clean Heart*, in order to Acceptance with God. For God is a Being infinitely *Pure* and *Holy*, and that cannot behold Iniquity, and

Ὅσιος.

and into whose Presence no *unclean* thing can enter; and therefore, *the Sacrifice of the Wicked*, as *Solomon* observes, must needs be *an Abomination to him*, and bring down a Curse rather than a Blessing; and the *Prayer of the Upright* only *his Delight*. Prov. 15. 8. More particularly, by this Expression of lifting up *Holy Hands* is meant these *three* Qualifications.

First, That the Suppliant be one of a *good Life*, or if he has not formerly been so, *repents*, and is sincerely resolv'd to live as becomes the Gospel of Christ, for the future. For how can he that is a Rebel to God, a Traytor and *Judas* to his Saviour, and that will obey none but the Devil and his own vile Lusts; how can such an one think that God should hearken to his Requests, who *consumes* God's Blessings *upon his Lusts*, as St. *James* expresses it, and as S. *Paul*, Turns the *Grace of God into Lasciviousness*, and sins still more that *Grace may still abound*; and is encourag'd by God's Goodness to persist in his Wickedness? He only can with Reason expect to be heard by a *Holy* God, who is either actually pious and good, or heartily desires and intends to be so.

Jam. 4. 3.

Secondly, By lifting up Holy Hands, is meant *Purity of Intention*, unmix'd Desires of advancing the Glory of God, and of the Supply of our real Needs, and of promoting our Eternal Salvation.

That

That is, no Man muſt dare to play the *Hypocrite* in his Devotion, and have other little ſiniſter *By*-Ends, ſuch as the Praiſe of Men, that his Vanity may be tickled by being eſteem'd more Righteous and Heavenly-minded than his Neighbours; and that under the Covert of more Religion than ordinary, he may the more ſecurely bring to paſs ſome wicked under-hand Deſign. That there have been ſuch ſort of Devotioniſts as theſe, is evident from what we find recorded of the *Phariſees*, Men to all Appearance extraordinary Religious, Faſting and Praying *frequently* and *long*, and very Exemplary in other Inſtances of Piety; when, after all, our Lord who knew their *Hearts*, has told us, they did it to be *ſeen, and to have Praiſe of Men*; and under Pretence of long Prayers, to inſinuate into Wealthy Widows Eſteem, that at length they might have an Opportunity to *devour their Houſes*. How many of this ſort there is now-a-days, God and their own Conſciences know beſt; but this is certain, that wherever the Guilt lies, 'tis a great Abomination to him, who is *Truth* it ſelf, and infinitely hates a *Lye*; eſpecially in Matters of *Religion*, where his *Honour* is ſo nearly concern'd.

Wherefore, let thoſe who find themſelves prick'd by what is now ſaid, take care that their Religion be more pure and *ſincere* for the Future; leſt our Lord's Woes to the Phariſees fall upon their Heads, and they be doom'd

doom'd to the Portion of Hypocrites, *where is Weeping and Gnaſhing of Teeth.*

Thirdly, The Word, ὅσιος, ſometimes ſignifies *Juſt* and *Upright*, without Fraud and Cheating Arts and Oppreſſion; and he that would be heard when he prays, muſt cleanſe his Hands from theſe, muſt do as he would be done to, and *provide things honeſt in the Sight of all Men*; and deſpiſe the Gain of Oppreſſion, as *Iſaiah* phraſes it, Chap. 33. Verſ. 15. *For* God is *Juſt* as well as Holy, and hates the ſly Windings of Deceit and Fraud; *He is about our Path, and ſpieth out all our Ways*, and will be a *ſwift Witneſs againſt thoſe that oppreſs*, inſtead of turning a *gracious Ear* to their Petitions. *Wherefore, let no Man go beyond or defraud his Brother in any Matter, for God is the Avenger of all ſuch*; but take care that his Hands be not defil'd with *unjuſt* Gain, leſt it make them uncapable of receiving a Bleſſing. Thus much for the firſt Requiſite to our praying *effectually*, the *lifting up Holy Hands.*

1 Theſ. 4. 6.

A ſecond is, That this be done *without Wrath*, that there be a Freedom from *Strife* and *Revenge*, and a Readineſs to *Reconciliation* and *Forgiveneſs.*

For as for a hot *angry* Diſpoſition, nothing more unfits a Man for Devotion than that; it makes the Mind continually in a *Storm*, breaks the Order and Connexion of Thoughts, puts the whole Soul into a Hurry, and makes it like *a Troubled Sea that cannot reſt.* And therefore, no wonder if it *caſt up Mire*

Mire and Dirt, Deſires impure and diſpleaſing to God, rather than the ſweet ſmelling Savour of an acceptable Sacrifice.

As our Religion in general, ſo Prayer in particular, is a *reaſonable* Service, and requires as great *Freedom* of Thought, and recollected Preſence of Mind, as any thing whatever. The *Object* of Prayer, is a Being of infinite *Sanctity*, and tranſcendent *Majeſty*, and this ſhould move us to approach him with the moſt awful and ſedate Temper of Mind; and that which is *pray'd for*, is, or ought to be of the greateſt Value, and which it moſt of all concerns us, to have beſtow'd upon us; and therefore it concerns us to have our Reaſon and Thoughts at *Command*, leſt our Petition ſhould be *rejected* for our ill *Management* of it.

Now, nothing more *diſcompoſes* the Mind, and deprives it of the Uſe of Reaſon, than the Paſſion of *Anger*: It puts the Spirits into ſuch a violent and unnatural Motion, as makes all the *Powers* of the Soul for a Time *unſerviceable*. Things are *apprehended* in ſtrange *Confuſion* and Diſorder, and *remembred* with much Imperfection, and fooliſh and ridiculous *Choices* are made by the *Will*; and all the *Affections*, conſequently, out of Courſe: Juſt as is the Condition of *Mad* Men, only the Fit is ſooner over. And is this a fitting Temper of Mind to approach the Throne of the *great God* in, and prefer Petitions for the greateſt Bleſſings? Let a Man, after he has been brawling with his Neighbours,

Neighbours, conſider if he were to go immediately to beg a Boon of his *Prince*, whether he ſhould not *then* do it with great *Diſadvantage*; how apt he ſhould then be to commit Indecencies, and to omit Matters of chief Concern in his Requeſt, and the like; and then let him ſay what he thinks of addreſſing to the great *King of Heaven* in ſuch an ill *Diſguiſe* of Soul? And whether he does not believe that he might ſpeed much better, if his Mind were *calmer* and more it *ſelf*? Now, the Returns of *Prayer* being ſo frequent, and angry Mens Brawlings and *Quarellings* ſo frequent; it muſt needs often be, that ſuch Men, unleſs they *omit* praying, which is ſtill worſe, muſt pray to God with Minds greatly diſcompos'd, and and unfit for the Performance of ſo Holy a Duty, at leaſt with any Succeſs.

As for a *Revengeful* Temper of Mind, that is a thing ſo *contrary* to him, whoſe Definition is Love, and who has ſo freely forgiven us ſo infinite a Debt, that no Deſires breath'd from *ſuch* a Soul, but muſt needs ſtink in his Noſtrils, and be utterly rejected by him. His Divine Son, the only *Mediator* between him and us, who preſents the Prayers of the Faithful, and intercedes for their Acceptance; will be ſo far from appearing in an implacable revengeful Man's Behalf, that he has declar'd (in a Parable before diſcours'd of, *Mat.* 18. 23.) he will deal with ſuch with the utmoſt Severity. God will accept nothing at our Hands without *Charity*, and a

Gift,

Gift, though brought to the Altar, muſt not be offer'd there, till he that is at Variance with his Brother be *reconcil'd* to him; he muſt *leave his Gift before the Altar, and go his Way, and firſt be reconcil'd to his Brother, and then come and offer his Gift*, Mat. 5. 23, 24.

A third Requiſite to our praying *ſucceſsfully*, is, that our Prayers be without *doubting*, or as 'tis expreſs'd, *Heb.* 22. *In full Aſſurance of Faith.* According to what our Lord ſaid upon Occaſion of the Barren Fig-Tree's being dry'd up from the Roots at his Word, which, when St. *Peter* and the reſt of the Diſciples wondred at; *Jeſus anſwer'd and ſaid unto them, have Faith in God, for verily I ſay unto you, whoſoever ſhall ſay unto this Mountain, be thou remov'd and caſt into the Sea, ſhall not doubt in his Heart, but believe that thoſe things he ſaith, ſhall come to paſs; he ſhall have whatſoever he ſaith. Therefore, I ſay unto you, what things ſoever ye deſire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye ſhall have them.* And elſewhere, *All things are poſſible to him that believeth.* To which agrees that of St. *James*, *If any Man lack Wiſdom, let him ask of God; but let him ask in Faith, nothing wavering, for ſuch a Man ſhall not receive any thing of the Lord*, James 1. 5, 6. The meaning of all which I ſuppoſe to be this, That, as the Apoſtles, upon their firm Belief of the *Truth* of our Lord's *Promiſe* of enabling them to work Miracles for the Advancement of the Chriſtian Religion, and of his *Power* to do accordingly, ſhould,

Mark 11, 22.

Mark 9. 23.

when they pray'd for his Help, be enabl'd to do as they desired; so all other Believers, if their Prayers are accompanied with a strong *Belief* of his *Veracity* in promising to hear the Prayers of the Faithful, of his *Ability* to relieve and help them, and of his infinite *Goodness* and *Willingness* to grant them their Desires, if it be *expedient* for them, they shall certainly speed well and receive a Blessing at the Hand of God.

The *very* Petitions they offer up, if for their *Good*, shall be granted them; and if *not* for their Good, God in his infinite Wisdom will bestow something else upon them, that shall be more for their Advantage: And, they may *depend* upon it, they shall not be sent away empty.

But, he that *wavereth*, and is of *doubtful* Mind in these Particulars, and prays with great Diffidency, and distrust of prevailing; as his Prayers must needs be very *cool*, and without that Life, and Fervour, and *Importunacy* (which we shall see presently is likewise necessary to our Success) so his Mind must be in strange *Agitation*, and toss'd between the Waves of two contrary and very *perplexing* Passions, *Hope* and *Fear*; and the latter having manifestly the Advantage with such a Man (for if his Hope were stronger than his Fear, he would be more fix'd and steady than he is) 'tis a Thousand to one, but at length, after intollerable Disquietudes and Anxiety of Mind, he will split upon *Despair* or down-right Atheism. So true is that of

St. *James*,

St. *James*, Chap. 1. Verſ. 6, 8. *He that wavereth, is like a Wave of the Sea, driven about and toſſed; a double minded Man is unſtable in all his Ways*; and ſo neceſſary is it, that we ſhould firmly *believe*, and be actually *perſwaded* when we pray, that our Petitions, if for our Good, ſhall be granted us by our Heavenly Father.

There is yet one thing more requir'd if we would *ſucceed* in our Devotions, and which is of very great Avail in this Matter; and that is, a Holy *Earneſtneſs* and *Importunity*: And 'tis a thing ſo much to be obſerv'd, that our Lord deliver'd two Parables (cited at the Beginning of this Diſcourſe) to this very Purpoſe, *That Men ought always to pray and not to faint.* In both there is a Delay and *Denial* for a Time, but at length, the *Importunate* prevail.

Now, though the Reaſon why our Saviour directs to this Importunity, cannot be the ſame with that mention'd in the Parables; *God*'s Quietneſs and Happineſs being not to be diſturb'd, nor he teas'd and *weari'd* into Compliance, as thoſe in the Parables were, yet there may be ſeveral other Reaſons given for it.

'Tis a Manifeſtation of our earneſt Deſire of prevailing, and that we indeed *highly value* what we thus *importunately* beg for; 'tis a means to make us *prize* a Bleſſing the more, which we ſo *hardly* come by; and to be the more *thankful* for it when we receive it, and the more careful not to *loſe* or *forfeit* it. 'Tis

a Tryal of our *Patience*, an Exercise of our *Faith* and Hope, and Dependence upon God; it teacheth *Humility* and *Self-Denial*, and Amendment of our *Faults*, lest our Continuance in *them* render us unworthy of God's Favour; it makes Devotion burn bright and vigorously, and is of great Advantage to all the Purposes of Religion.

For these, and such like Reasons it is, that our good God, *who giveth to all Men freely, and upbraideth not*, has made *Importunity* a Condition, in order to the obtaining our Requests, and indeed, the Blessings God encourages us to ask, and bestows upon us, are so *great*, that the *utmost* Earnestness, and most *importunate* Addresses, and the *longest* Attendance, will be abundantly repaid with a Grant at last.

Having thus done what I at first propos'd to do upon the Parable of the *importunate Widow*, and prov'd that Prayer is not only the *Privilege* but the *Duty* of every Christian, and shewn how *far* the Obligation to this Duty does *extend*, and what those Requisites are, which are necessary to the *effectual* Performance of this Duty, *viz*, *Purity of Life and Manners*, *Sincerity of Intention*, *Just and Upright Dealing with one another*, express'd by St. *Paul*, by lifting up *Holy Hands*; and likewise a quiet *peaceable* Temper of Mind, not given to *Strife* and *Wrath*, but apt to be *reconcil'd* and to *forgive*; together with a *full Assurance of Faith* in the *Veracity*, and *Power*, and *Goodness* of God, accompanied

companied with a Holy *Earnestness* and *Importunity*: It remains only that we all of us be exhorted, diligently and heartily, according to the Measures before describ'd, to put in Practice this so *beneficial* a Duty.

There is no Place, no Time but we have need of God's Favour and Protection, and we may always, and in every Place beseech it of him; and he has promis'd to hear and accept us, whenever we address to him as we *ought*. 'Tis *Prayer* that *sanctifies* Prosperity, and makes light the Burthens of Adversity, and brings a Blessing upon our Business and Callings, and is the greatest Cordial upon the Bed of Sickness; wherefore, *Let us pray every where, lifting up Holy Hands without Wrath and doubting*; and by an *Importunity* not to be *denied*, do a pleasing Violence to Heaven; *For every one that thus asketh, receiveth. If a Son shall ask any of us that is a Father, Bread, or a Fish, or an Egg, will we give him a Stone, or a Serpent, or a Scorpion? If we then being evil, know how to give good Gifts to our Children, how much more shall our Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit, and all other needful Blessings to them that ask him?* Matth. 11. 10. &c.

The PRAYER.

MOst Gracious God, who not only permittest, but dost encourage, nay command us to make our Requests known

unto thee, and haſt promiſed by thy Bleſſed Son, that whatever we ask in his Name, if it be expedient for us, we ſhall receive; aſſiſt me with thy Grace ſo to advert to the All-ſufficiency and Almighty Goodneſs of thy Divine Nature, and the miſerable Indigency of my own, that I may have a due Value for this ineſtimable Favour, and be ſo much my own Friend, as often to bend my Knees before the Throne of thy Grace, and lay my Supplications before thee. I humbly confeſs, O Lord, and deplore my hitherto great and ſtupid Backwardneſs in this Heavenly and moſt beneficial Duty, and earneſtly beſeech thee, that for the time to come, thou would'ſt prepare my Soul by the Inſpirations of thy Bleſſed Spirit, that it may become a Houſe of Prayer, and a fit Habitation for thee my God. May I be frequent in pious Ejaculations, and Mental Breathings towards thee my chiefeſt Good, and conſtant in the more ſolemn Returns both of Publick and Private Devotion: And that I may be ſucceſsful, and my Prayers bring down a Bleſſing, Grant that I may lift up Holy Hands to thee without Wrath or Doubting, be pure in my Intentions, careful to practiſe theſe Graces that I pray for, and in all my Converſation pious and juſt, free from all Strife, and Malice, and Revenge, and every Thing that is diſpleaſing to thee, remembring, that the Prayer of the Wicked is an Abomination. And may a full Aſſurance of

Faith

Faith and Holy Importunity always accompany my Addreſſes to thee, that ſo I may not be ſent empty away, but receive a gracious Anſwer to my Petitions, to the Relief of my Neceſſities, and the Advancement of thy Glory, through the Merits of our Bleſſed Saviour Jeſus, in whoſe Name we preſent all that we beg of thy Bounty, and hope to be heard through his prevailing Interceſſion. *Amen.*

PARABLE XIV.

Of the Phariſee *and the* Publican.

Luke xviii. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.

Jeſus ſpake this Parable unto certain which truſted in themſelves that they were Righteous, and deſpiſed others.

Two Men went up into the Temple to Pray, the one a Phariſee, the other a Publican.

The Phariſee ſtood and pray'd thus with himſelf; God, I thank thee that I am not as other Men are, Extortioners, Unjuſt, Adulterers, or even as this Publican.

I Faſt twice in the Week; I give Tithes of all that I poſſeſs.

And the Publican ſtanding afar off, would not lift up ſo much as his Eyes unto Heaven,

Heaven, but ſmote upon his Breaſt, ſaying, God be merciful to me a Sinner. I tell you, this Man went down to his Houſe juſtified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himſelf ſhall be abaſed; and he that humbleth himſelf ſhall be exalted.

THIS Parable of our Lord's, we ſee from the Introduction and Concluſion of it, is level'd againſt *Spiritual Pride*; or the being highly *opinionated* of ones own *Righteouſneſs*, and ſo puff'd up by it, as to deſpiſe others as *vile profane* Perſons, whoſe Religion is not with *Oſtentation*, and who pretend not to ſuch extraordinary Sanctity: And is intended to ſhew, that an humble ſelf-condemn'd Sinner, who though he has been wicked is *ſenſible* of it, and with Shame and Sorrow confeſſes his Guilt before God; is more acceptable in his ſight, and ſhall be ſooner pardon'd by him, and advanc'd to his Honour, than he that vaunts of his Vertue and the Performance of the External Duties of Religion. His *Pride* and Exaltation of himſelf ſhall *abaſe* him, while the others *Humility* ſhall *exalt* him.

And this is very lively repreſented in this Parable, in the Perſons of a *Phariſee* and a *Publican*, and their going up into the Temple to *pray*. The *Phariſees* were a Sect among the *Jews*, that made the greateſt Pre-

tensions to *extraordinary* Holiness, and *strict* Observance of every *Punctilio* of their Law; they wore a peculiar *Garb*, and used a different sort of *Gait* from other Men, as Persons always busied in the serious Contemplation of the best Things; they were of very *reserv'd* Conversations, and of very *morose* Countenances, as greatly mortified, and Strangers to the World; their *Prayers* were *publick* and *long*, their *Fasts severe and often*, their *Search* of the Scriptures *diligent*, and their Contribution to the Maintenance of God's Ministers *exact* and very *liberal*; they paid Tithes of *All* that they possess'd; and by this Means were highly *reverenc'd* by the *People*, and as highly *conceited* of *Themselves*. The *Publicans* were Men of quite another Character and Estimation; they were Officers that gather'd up the *Roman* Customs and Tribute, and hir'd or *farm'd* them of the Emperor, and then raised Estates to themselves by *Exaction* and *Oppression*: And their Lives were so *busie*, and so constantly taken up with such *vile* Affairs as these, that they thought but little of Religion, and *pretended* to as little, and therefore were look'd upon by the *Jews* as the very worst of Men, and call'd *Sinners* by way of *Eminence*.

These two so very *different* sort of Men, *went up into the Temple to pray*. To see a *Pharisee* in the Temple was no Wonder, they were the greatest Frequenters of that Holy Place, and as constant at Divine Service

vice as the Prieſts that miniſtred; but to meet a *Publican* there was a great Rarity: the *Receipt of Cuſtom* was all the Temple *they* generally frequented, and *Mammon* was the *God* they worſhip'd in it; and how to *gripe*, and over-reach, and oppreſs, was the ſubject of their Thoughts, and their *Devotion*.

But however *unuſual* it might be, yet we ſee a *Publican* went up into the *Temple to pray*; as Scandalous as his Profeſſion was, as full of Hurry and Application to the World, yet he found Time for the Exerciſe of Religion: And indeed, no *lawful* Profeſſion, of how ill *Repute* ſoever, but may be very conſiſtent with a Senſe of Piety; and Men of the moſt *buſie* Employments, may, if they pleaſe, find time, and that *daily* too, *to go up into the Temple to pray*. And that Employment, whatever it be, and however *gainful*, that is a Hinderance to Religion, *publick* as well as *private*, is for that very Reaſon unlawful, and ought to be given over; *For what ſhall it profit a Man, if he ſhall gain the whole World, and loſe his own Soul?* There are many Callings or Ways of getting a Livelihood now-a-days, which have an ill Repute, and that *deſervedly*, through the ill Behaviour of ſome that follow them, which yet are very Lawful, and very neceſſary in a State: And therefore, Let not thoſe that have ſuch Employments plead them in Excuſe for their *Profaneneſs* and *Irreligion*, as if their Employments were the unavoidable Occaſion of their being Wicked:

ed: For if their Employments are neither againſt the Laws of God or Man, they may Conſcientiouſly and Religiouſly diſcharge them; and if they are upon either Account *unlawful*, they muſt immediately *leave* them, and betake themſelves to ſome other *honeſt* Profeſſion.

The Employment of a *Publican*, was of *all* the moſt ſcandalous among the *Jews*, and that not without Reaſon; and yet we find a *Publican* at *Prayers* as well as a *Phariſee*, and the more *acceptable* Suppliant of the Two: And if *One*, why not the *whole Order* if they had pleas'd? And accordingly, when the *Publicans* came to *John the Baptiſt*, (a Perſon of the ſevereſt Sanctity) to be Baptis'd of him, and ſaid unto him, *Maſter*, *what ſhall* We *do?* He did not charge them immediately to *leave* their Profeſſion, but only, *Not to exact more than was appointed them:* 'Twas *Exaction* made their Office hateful both to God and Man, and if that were amended, the Employment was as Innocent as others. And when the *Soldiers* (Men generally, of all Men, the moſt Looſe and Wicked) demanded of him likewiſe, *And what ſhall* We *do?* He does not condemn their Profeſſion, but bids them do no *Violence* to any Man, nor Accuſe any *falſly*, and be *content* with their *Wages*, *Luke* 3. 12, 13, 14. A Man that conſiders Things, would not *chooſe* to be of an Employment that carries great Temptations along with it to Wickedneſs; but if he were

were brought up to ſuch an Employment, and knows not how to ſubſiſt in any other Way, his Buſineſs is, to conſider *wherein* lies the greateſt Temptation and Danger of it, and arm himſelf diligently againſt that, and then he may live as Innocently, and ſerve God as Acceptably, as his Neighbours. But to live wickedly in ſuch a Calling, and then lay the Blame upon the *Temptations* that go along with it, is too ſlender an Excuſe to do any Service: for if the Calling be *lawful*, no doubt but it may be *innocently* manag'd if the Man pleaſes; and if it be *unlawful*, he muſt for no Conſiderations whatever continue in it. And a Soldier or a *Publican*, for Inſtance, though of the *worſt* of lawful Profeſſions, yet we ſee may keep a good Conſcience, and live orderly and repent, and ſerve God as acceptably, nay, perhaps *more* ſo than others of higher Pretenſions; for the *Publican* as well as the *Phariſee* went up into the Temple to pray, and the *Publican* went away *juſtified* rather than the *Phariſee*.

But what was the Reaſon of that? One would think a Man of ſo *great Sanctity* as a *Phariſee* ſhould be more acceptable to God than ſo *vile* a Sinner as a *Publican*? Why, the Reaſon of this was, that the *Publican*, notwithſtanding the *ill* Character, his *Profeſſion* threw upon him, and the high Pretenſions of the *Phariſee*, the *Publican* was the *Better Man* of the Two. The *Phariſee*, with much Pride and *Self-eſteem*, advanc'd

vanc'd high into the Temple, and then, vauntingly inſiſted in his own praiſe, *I Faſt twice a Week, I give Tithes of all that I poſſeſs*; and utterly devoid of the Fundamental Grace of *poverty of Spirit*, he look'd upon his Righteouſneſs as too much his *own*, and uncharitably judg'd the *Publican* for the ſake of his Profeſſion, and then haughtily *ſcorn'd* him, as vile and profane in compariſon with himſelf; *God, I thank thee that I am not as other Men are, or even as this* Publican. He that is not ſo wicked as other Men, ought indeed *to give God Thanks*, for 'tis *he* that made him to *differ*; but then it ought to be with *Humility*, and a due Senſe of his own *natural* Vileneſs and propenſity to Vice, and of thoſe remaining Wickedneſſes which *ſtill* too eaſily beſet him; giving God all the Glory of what is *good* in him, and reſerving to *himſelf* only *Shame and Confuſion of Face* for the Sins which do ſtill too eaſily beſet him, and for his not making ſo good uſe of the divine Grace and Aſſiſtance as he might and ſhould have done. But there was nothing of *this* in the *Phariſee*'s Thankſgiving; 'twas only full of Pride, and Vain-glory, and Self-conceit; and that *unhallow'd* every Thing elſe that was Good in him, and render'd him and his Prayers abominable in the ſight of God, *who reſiſteth the proud, and giveth Grace* only *to the humble*: Such as was that *Publican* whom he ſo haughtily deſpis'd.

For

For *he*, in an humble Senſe of his former Wickedneſs, and deep Shame and Sorrow for it, ſtood *afar off*, as not worthy to come near the Holy Majeſty of God; *and would not ſo much as lift up his polluted Eyes to Heaven*, the place of perfect Holineſs and Purity: but, like a true *ſelf-condemn'd* Penitent, *ſmote upon his Breaſt*, and in bitter Remorſe of Soul ſaid, *God be merciful to me a Sinner!* And for this his humble Penitence, *He went down to his Houſe juſtified rather than the* Phariſee; *for every one that exalteth himſelf ſhall be abaſed, and he that humbleth himſelf ſhall be exalted.* A truly *humble Temper of Mind* is better than all the outward performances of Religion; and a penitent *Publican*, that is indeed *poor in Spirit*, is far more eſteemed of God, than he that makes Long Prayers, and Faſts often, and Tithes all his Subſtance, and is *proud* of this when he has done, and *deſpiſes* thoſe that make not ſo much *Oſtentation* of Religion as he does. Without *Humility*, all is *Vain-glory* and *Hypocriſie*; and the ſeemingly moſt *ſanctified* Perſon that has it not, is like a *painted Sepulchre*, beautiful *without*, but full of Rottenneſs *within*.

By what has been hitherto ſaid by Way of *Comment* upon this Parable, and from the Introduction and Concluſion of it (as was ſaid) 'tis very plain that 'tis deſign'd to recommend the great, nay, fundamental Grace of *Spiritual Humility*, or Poverty of Spirit with relation to *Vertue*: And to ſhew, that

let

let a Man have never ſo much of Vertue or Religion, if he is *proud* of it, it renders all abominable in the Sight of God; and that none but the *humble Soul is his Delight*. In my Diſcourſe therefore upon this Parable, I ſhall endeavour *three* things;

Firſt, To ſhew what the Grace of *Spiritual Humility* is;

Secondly, How *excellent* and *beneficial* a Grace it is, and how *vile* and *miſchievous* the contrary *Vice* is; and

Thirdly, How highly this Vertue ſhall be *rewarded*.

As for the firſt, What the Grace of Spiritual Humility is; I in the firſt place think in the *Negative*, that it can't be a thinking *worſe* of a Man's ſelf than he really deſerves; for no Man certainly can be oblig'd by Religion to be *miſtaken* in himſelf, it being one of the chief things that we learn in *Chriſtianity* as well as *Ethicks*, rightly to *know ones ſelf*: And when there is any thing in a Man that is indeed *Praiſe-worthy*, I can't ſee why the Man *himſelf* may not be ſenſible of it as well as *others*; and innocently *pleaſe* himſelf with reflecting upon it, and *love* what bears ſo much Reſemblance to, and is an Emanation from the Eternal Fountain of Goodneſs and Perfection. Nay, He that *dwells* much with himſelf, and heedfully reflects upon his Actions, and the Bent and Inclination of his Mind, as every Man *ought* to do; can't be conceiv'd to be ignorant of what is *good* in him, any more than what is *evil*;

evil; and the same Attention which is requisite that a Man may know his *Errors* and *Miscarriages*, will likewise inform him of what is *vertuous* in him, and of *good Report*. And further, How can a Man be *thankful* to him who is the Giver of every good and perfect Gift, for the *intellectual* Favours he bestows upon him (of which *Grace to live vertuously* is the cheif) who is not first conscious that he has *receiv'd* the Blessing? The Elders in the Revelations that took their Crowns from their Heads, and cast them before the Throne, as an Acknowledgment from whom they had receiv'd them, first must be suppos'd to know that they had them *on*; And if there be such a thing as St. *Peter* calls the *Answer of a good Conscience towards God*, a Man must first be *sensible* of his good Actions, before he can feel that inward *Approbation* of them.

I thought fit to say thus much in the *Negative* about Spiritual Humility, because it has been taught by some that pretend to the most *extraordinary* Religion, that we ought to entertain none but *vile* and *abject* Thoughts of our selves, to be conscious of nothing that is *good* in us, but to call our selves the *vilest* of *Sinners*, and the *worst* of *Men*; according to St. *Paul*'s Example, who calls himself *the chief of Sinners*, 1 Tim. 1. 15. But since it cannot be true, for a sincerely *pious*, *sober*, and *chaste* Man for Instance, to call himself the most *prophane*, the most *intemperate* and *debauch'd* Wretch living, for he must needs

be sensible that is *not* so; therefore a more *discreet* Way of Humiliation and Confession of our Faults should be introduc'd in its Room; for nothing that is *untrue* can be pleasing and acceptable unto God: And, as no Man ought to think of himself more *highly* than he ought to think, so neither should he untruly *vilifie* and *miscall* himself, but think and speak *soberly, according as God has given to him the Measure of Faith.* 'Tis the same St. *Paul*'s Advice, *Rom.* 12. 3. whose Example is urg'd for so *extremely* debasing a Man's self in his own Esteem; and therefore, when *he* said of himself, That he was the *chief of Sinners*, it must look *back* to his former Wickedness in *persecuting the Church of Christ*, and could not be true as to his *present* Condition when he spoke it, for he was then a *chosen Vessel*, and *not inferior to any of the Apostles.* And whatever *good* Man will use that Expression after him, its Signification must be *restrain'd*, either with Reference to *past* Wickednesses, or some particular Vice which too easily besets him; and cannot be true in its *largest* Sense, of any *sincerely-good Man.* And 'tis a strange kind of Humiliation, that is made up of the Confession of Faults which a Man never knew himself to be guilty of; which yet is much in Vogue with some sort of People, but does indeed look too *Stage-like* to be thought real by any discerning Man.

Poverty of Spirit therefore does not consist in a Man's making himself *worse* than he is,

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(and truly there is no ne[ed] he should do so, every Man living having enough of *real* Vileness to humble him before God) and in *overlooking* every thing that is *commendable* in him; and the *Pharisee* in the Parable might very *innocently* have *thank'd God that he was not as other Men*, Fornicators, Unjust, *Adulterers, or even as a Publican*; had there not been something much worse than this, mix'd with his Thanksgiving: And it was *this*. He was *proud* of his living more circumspectly than other Men, he arrogated much of the Praise to *himself*, and *despis'd* one, who, by reason his *Profession*, he thought was a more loose and careless Liver; and never reflected upon his *Failures* and *Imperfections*, but was wholly taken up with *admiring* himself, and vaunting of his *Vertue*, and did not return, as he ought to have done, *all* the *Glory* to *God*. So that 'tis not *all* thinking *well* of ones Conversation and Virtuous Living that is *Spiritual Pride*, but only when we think *better* of it than we *should* do, and forget our *Sins* and Imperfections, or arrogantly ascribe the *Praise* to our *selves*, not remembring who made us to differ, and neglecting to return the Glory to *him*, and are so exalted in our own Conceits, as to despise and contemn others, because their Religion is not with *Shew* and *Ostentation*.

Spiritual Humility then, as 'tis oppos'd to this *Spiritual Pride*, consists in two things.

First, In not *overvaluing* our spiritual Excellencies, nor our *selves* by reason

of them, but returning all the *Praiſe* and *Glory* to *God*, who is the Author of every good and perfect Gift.

'Tis to remember that *he* made us to *differ*, and that we have *nothing*, not ſo much as a good *Thought*, but what we receive from *him*, in whoſe Divine Aid is all our Sufficiency.

'Tis to reflect upon the Imperfections and Defects of even our *beſt* Actions, and how much Need there is of God's *Mercy* and *favourable* Judgment, after we have done all that we can in his Service. 'Tis to remember likewiſe, that with ſuch great Aſſiſtances from above as we have receiv'd, we might have been much *better* than we are, and have practis'd *more Graces* of Chriſtianity, and that in *higher Degrees* of *Perfection*.

And when there ariſes any inward Complacency in our Breaſts from a Vertuous Action, or we meet with any commendation from others; 'tis then immediately to give *God* the *Glory*, and transfer all the *Praiſe* to him, and ſuffer no vain Tumours to remain upon our Minds, nor look down with Scorn upon others that have leſs Eſteem and Reputation in the World: But rather to humble our ſelves before God at the Thoughts of the Pollutions that are ſtill upon our Souls, and reflect how great a Debt of Gratitude lies upon us to our great Benefactor, who has given us (unworthy as we are) ſuch great Meaſures of his Grace; and reſolve to make him a due *return*, of a daily increaſing *Praiſe*, and *Obedience*, and *Love*. *Se-*

Secondly, Spiritual Humility conſiſts in a due Apprehenſion of the *Vileneſs* of our *Sins*, and the great *Aggravations* of them; and as we muſt not *overvalue* our *Vertues*, nor our *ſelves* by Reaſon of them, ſo neither ſhould we *undervalue* our *Vices*, *i. e.* endeavour to *palliate* and *excuſe* them, and give them more *favourable* Names than they deſerve, ſuch as unavoidable *Frailties*, pitiable *Infirmities*, the Effects of *Surprize*, and the like: Nor think our ſelves to be *leſs* abominable in the Sight of God for our *Commiſſion* of them, than indeed we are.

There is no Man living, how *good* ſoever, but is ſtill a *Sinner*; and not only Imperfections and Frailties may be laid to his Charge, but God knows, too often, Sins of a *deeper* Dye; as *David* and *Peter*, we know, fell into the very worſt of Wickedneſſes, though the one, otherwiſe a *Man after God's own Heart*; and the other an *Apoſtle* of our Lord and Holy *Martyr* for his Truth. Now *Spiritual Humility* will give a Man a due Senſe of his Spiritual *Vileneſs*, and repreſent his *Sin* (whatever it be) as indeed the greateſt Evil, a Violation of the higheſt Authority, and of a moſt Holy, and Juſt, and Good Law, and the very heighth of *Ingratitude* too, as being a Reſiſting the Will of our greateſt *Friend* and *Benefactor*: And 'twill ſhew him the *Aggravations* of his Guilt, as being contracted againſt ſufficient Light and *Knowledge*, and when he had ſufficient Aid likewiſe from Abve to enable

him to *resist* the Temptations to it if he would. These, and the like Considerations, which a Man truly *humble in Spirit* will call to mind, will humble him still more, and render him as vile in his *own* Eyes as he thinks he is in *God's*; and make him prostrate himself before the Throne of the Divine Majesty with Shame and Sorrow, and Confusion of Face, *confessing* his Guilt, *condemning* himself for it, and humbly imploring *Forgiveness* of his offended God, and that he would turn away that fierce Anger from him, which he is very sensible he has but too much *deserv'd*.

Thus *David* fram'd a Psalm on purpose to confess and bewail his great Transgressions in the Matter of *Uriah*: He then forgot all that was good in him, and did not expect that his former excellent Piety should cover and make Amends for those foul Sins: He did not search for *Excuses*, and endeavour to extenuate his Guilt; but, like a truly humble Penitent, chang'd his usual Strain of Praise and *Thanksgiving*, for the Accents of *Grief* and *Shame*, and better *Remorse*, *acknowledging* his Transgressions, and having his Sins ever before him, and with the most pathetick Earnestness of a *broken and contrite Heart*, begging God's Forgiveness, and that he would again *Create in him a clean Heart and renew a right Spirit within him*: As if those his great Wickednesses had not only polluted all that before was good in him, but quite *destroy'd* the Rectitude and Integrity of his Soul.

And

And as *David*, so S. *Peter*, when he reflected upon the great Baseness of Denying his divine Master and Saviour, his Spirit was so truly humbled, that without endeavouring in the least to conceal or palliate his Fault, *he went out and wept bitterly.*

And so the *Publican* in the Parable, would not so much as *lift up his Eyes to Heaven*, but stood *afar off*, in the Court of the *Gentiles*, which was the lowest of all, and with great Compunction of Spirit *smote upon his Breast*, *and said*, *God be merciful to me a Sinner!*

And thus much for the *First Thing* to be done upon this Parable, which was, to shew what the Grace of *Spiritual Humility* is; (*viz.*) a not *Over-valuing our spiritual Excellencies*, nor *our Selves* by reason of them, nor *despising others* as *less* Holy, but returning all the *Glory* to *God*, who made us to *differ*; nor *undervaluing*, or endeavouring to excuse and *extenuate* our *Wickednesses*; but an impartial considering the *Vileness* and great *Aggravations* of them, and sincere *humbling* our Selves for them at the Throne of God.

The *Second Thing* to be done is, to shew how *excellent* and *beneficial* this *Vertue* is in our Christian Course, and how *vile* and *mischievous* the contrary *Vice* is.

'Tis a sufficient Argument that this Vertue is very excellent, and of great Benefit to Christians, that our Lord has plac'd it in the *Front* of his *Beatitudes*, which he be-

gins thus, *Bleſſed are the poor in Spirit.* Like a wiſe Maſter-Builder, he lays the Foundation *low* of a Building that was to reach ſo very *high*; and *Humbleneſs of Mind* muſt be the *Ground-work* of that Religion which will advance a Man to *Heaven.*

Piety without Humility is very apt to make Men top-heavy, and over-ſet like a Ship without her Ballaſt; 'tis this that preſerves the *Soul* unſhaken amidſt the *Temptations* of the World, as that makes a *Ship* ſail *ſure* and *ſteady* amidſt the *mighty Billows.* The Houſe in the Goſpel that was founded upon a *ſandy Surface* of the Earth, ſoon yielded to the Fury of the Tempeſt, and great was the Fall of it; our Lord therefore begins with *poverty of Spirit*, as the *Baſis* and great *ſecurity* of all his other Building; which he foreſaw and foretold was to undergo the Shock of many a furious *Storm*, and contend with all the Powers of the Prince of Darkneſs. But more *particularly*, this Grace of *Spiritual Humility* is ſo excellent and highly beneficial, that nothing *more* conduces to a Man's *Spiritual growth*, and Encreaſe in Vertue, nor renders him more *dear* both to God and Man.

Firſt, Nothing more conduces to a Man's *ſpiritual growth*, and Encreaſe in Vertue. For, 'tis very true in *Religion* as well as in *Worldly Affairs*, That nothing makes Men more *induſtrious* than a due ſenſe of their *Wants*, and the *poorneſs* of their *Stock*; whereas, when a Man thinks he has *Abundance*, he

he is generally Slothful and Careleſs, and *Impoveriſhment* becomes his Lot rather than a farther *Improvement*: An humble Senſe of a Man's *Imperfections* and *Sins*, will make him *doubly diligent*, and conſequently to *improve* greatly in the School of Righteouſneſs; but haughty *Conceitedneſs* will certainly make him grow *worſe and worſe*. Nay, there will be no *End* of the *humble minded* Man's Improvement; for 'tis always found in the purſuit of *Vertue* as well as of *Knowledge*, that the more *real* Vertue *increaſes* in the Soul of a Good Man, the more and greater the *Defects* of his Vertue appear to be, and conſequently, the more will his *Diligence* be quickned and ſpurr'd on; as St. *Paul*, the farther he advanced in the Chriſtian Race, the more conſcious he grew that he had not yet apprehended what he endeavoured after, and was not yet perfect, and that made him forget what was *behind*, his *former* Attainments, and reach out to what was ſtill *before*, what he had not *yet* attain'd to, and *eagerly preſs forward* to the Mark, the Prize of the High Calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus. Now the Conſequence of this extraordinary *Diligence* muſt needs be an extraordinary *growth* and *increaſe*, and ſo ſtill *onward* in a quick and vigorous Motion, till he finiſhes his Vertuous Race, and is *perfect as his Father which is in Heaven is perfect*.

And as this *ſpiritual Humility* makes a Man move *ſwiftly* in the Chriſtian Courſe,

ſo

ſo it makes him tread *ſurely* too; it ballances him, and keeps him upon his Centre, and ſecures him from thoſe dangerous *Falls* which too often are the Fate of the *high-minded and proud*; for 'twas Pride and Haughtineſs of Spirit, we know, that ruin'd the Prince of the Fallen Angels, and his Accomplices. But *poverty of Spirit* is the great Security of a Chriſtian againſt the ſubtle Arts of the Tempter; 'tis the proper Mark and Character of a Diſciple of the meek, lowly Jeſus; and is a diſpoſition of Mind the moſt of all apt for *Repentance*, which is a Grace of infinite Value, as being abſolutely *neceſſary to Salvation*; and entitles a Man, in a peculiar manner, to the Divine Aid and Aſſiſtance; *for God giveth Grace to the Humble.*

Secondly, As this *ſpiritual Humility* is of the greateſt *Benefit* to a Chriſtian, ſo does it render him highly *dear* both to *God* and *Man*: All Men love an *humble* Man, and look upon him as a Wiſe and Extraordinary Perſon; and he that is pious and circumſpect in his Converſation, and yet is not *proud* of it, nor deſpiſes or haughtily reflects upon others that live more at *large* than he does, but adviſes them better, *ſeaſonably*, and with *Meekneſs* and *Humility*; ſuch a Man is eſteem'd as a Perſon ſent from God to do Good to Mankind, that ſeeing his Good Works mix'd with *poverty of Spirit*, they may be inclined to imitate ſo lovely an Example, and glorifie their Father which is

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in Heaven, by treading in *his* Steps. And as for *God*, S. *Peter* and S. *James*, and the Wisest of Men all agree, that *he resisteth the proud, but giveth Grace to the humble.* And *our Lord* himself, at the end of the Parable we are now considering, says expresly, *He that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*; and the *humble Publican* went down to his House justified, rather than the *haughty Pharisee*; so *beneficial* and highly *valuable*, both with *God* and *Man*, is *Humility of Spirit.*

But on the contrary, to be *opinionated* and *proud* of ones Vertue, is a great *Misfortune* as well as *Fault*, and brings a great deal of a *peculiar* sort of Trouble and Uneasiness along with it: 'Tis a Thing hated both by God and Men, and is despis'd and disgrac'd by every Body. To what would otherwise be really *praise-worthy*, it brings the greatest *Disparagement* in the World; and if a Man's Conversation be but *indifferent*, and like other Mens, then, nothing makes him more ridiculous, than much to *value* himself, upon what is of so little or no *Excellency*. And what a Pain 'tis for Men that look upon *themselves* as *extraordinary* Persons, to see others so *far* from that Opinion, as rather to *slight* and *deprecate* them; may easily be imagin'd. And indeed, 'tis the Mishap of this sort of People, always to meet with such kind of Entertainment as this; Men setting themselves on purpose to *tease* and *worry* 'em, that if possible, they may make them *asha-*

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med, and *weary* of a thing ſo generally *hated*.

But beſides this *peculiar* ſort of *Vexation* and *Uneaſineſs* that attends *ſpiritual Pride*, there is ſomething much worſe to be ſaid of it, *viz.* that 'tis almoſt impoſſible for Men infected with this Vice ever to *improve* in Religion and grow better. For in the *Nature* of the Thing, nothing *ſlackens* Diligence and *Induſtry* more than this, without which no *progreſs* can be made in any thing, or at beſt a very ſlow one, eſpecially where there are ſuch Difficulties to be ſtruggled with as in Religion; and what ſignifies Inſtruction or Reproof (unleſs it be to gall and enrage him) to a Man that thinks his Vertue very *extraordinary* if not *compleat* already? And beſides, *God*, from whom we derive all our Sufficiency, *reſiſts the proud*; and therefore, as *Solomon* ſays, no wonder if *when pride cometh then cometh deſtruction, and a haughty Spirit be the forerunner of a fall*.

Beſides, as the Condition of Mankind is *now*, to be proud of *Vertue* is to be proud of *Imperfection*; for ſuch is the Vertue even of the *beſt* Men upon Earth: nay, 'tis to be proud of that which *is not*; for no Man that is *proud* of his Vertue is *indeed* Vertuous, that *poverty of Spirit* being wanting which gives the Value to all Religious Actions, and renders them acceptable in the Sight of God. And it not only pollutes and unhallows what might otherwiſe deſerve the Name of Vertue, but (as was hinted before) it keeps a Man from growing better; it *blinds* him, that he

he cannot discern his Faults; and he is so taken up with admiring his *Excellencies*, and (with the *Pharisee*) *thanking God that he is not as other men are, Extortioners, Unjust, Adulterers*, or the like, that his great *Defects* pass unobserv'd by him: And with the Man in the Fable, he is so busie in gazing upon things *above* himself, that he perceives not the Dangers *under his feet* till he falls *into them.*

Having thus endeavour'd to shew what is the Grace of *spiritual Humility*, and how *excellent* and highly *beneficial* a Grace it is, and how *vile* and *mischievous* the contrary *Vice* is, destructive of all Religion, and hateful both to God and Man; I proceed now in the *Last* Place to shew, how highly this Vertue shall be *rewarded*; which is express thus in the Close of this Parable, *He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

That is, in short, Mens *Humbleness of Mind* in point of *Vertue*, their *Self-Annihilation*, and returning all the *Glory* of their Good Actions to God, as the *Author* of whatever is commendable in them; and without *priding* themselves in their *present* Attainments, pressing on still to *greater Degrees* of Perfection and Heavenly Life: This shall, in the World of Eternal Felicity and Glory, be rewarded with the Impression of a near Resemblance to that Divine Fountain of Holiness and Perfection, whom here they acknowledg'd to be the Giver of every *good and perfect gift.* They shall then *see him as he is*, and they shall *be like him*; No Failures, no Slips or Imper-

Imperfections, no Avocations from the happy Employment of Admiring and Loving God, shall be *There*, which in *this* Life are the perpetual Clogs and Vexations of a Holy Soul; but with their Faculties *free* and *vigorous*, they shall *fully* enjoy this *supreme Good*, without *Interruption*, to all *Eternity*. This is that which makes a Heaven; this is to enjoy the Happiness of *God himself*; and this Heaven and this Happiness shall be the Portion of the *poor in Spirit*, who here ascribe to *God* the Praise and Glory of their *vertuous* Actions.

And their Humbling themselves before his Majesty, in a deep Sense of the Vileness and Ingratitude of their *Sins* (which the best Man living is not wholly without) shall be rewarded with the *Pardon* of them; they shall be lifted up from their Prostration at the *Feet* of their God and Saviour, and be received into his *Bosom*; and Joy, *extraordinary Joy*, shall be in Heaven in the Presence of the Holy Angels for their Repentance. They shall be exalted from the State of *Penitents* to that of *Friends*, nay *Sons of God*, and all Tears for the Future shall be for ever wip'd from their Eyes, and they shall participate of the Joy of their Lord from Everlasting to Everlasting. And such an Exaltation as this, is, no doubt, an abundant Recompense for all the Pains of Spiritual Mortification; and a Repentance *so* rewarded, will never be repented of.

To

To conclude therefore; If we hope to have a share in that ineffable Felicity which shall be the Reward of this Humility of Spirit we have been discoursing of, we must make it our Endeavour to tread the Path that leads to it: We must *humble* our selves before God according to the Measures above described, that he may *exalt us in due time*. And (as without whom we can do no good Thing) we must with all Earnestness and Importunity beg *his* gracious Assistance, who was *meek and lowly in Heart*; that we may follow his Steps, and return him all the Glory of our *pious* Advances, who worketh in us to will and to do of his good Pleasure; and be so duly affected with Shame and Sorrow for our *Wickednesses*, as with the *Publican*, in bitter Remorse, and with sincere Purposes of Amendment, to smite upon our Breasts, and say, *God be merciful to us miserable Sinners.*

The PRAYER.

O Meek and Lowly Jesus, who resistest the Proud, and givest Grace to the Humble, and hast plac'd Poverty of Spirit in the Front of thy Beatitudes, as the Foundation and Ground-work of thy Holy Religion; Teach me this excellent Grace, I humbly beseech thee, and grant that I may hate and shun Pride above all Things, as the most dangerous and destructive Vice, which defiles

deſiles every thing however otherwiſe commendable and excellent, and naturally tends to the Pit of Deſtruction. And to allay all vain Tumors that ſhall ariſe, give me, O Bleſſed Saviour, a true Senſe of the Corruption of my Nature, my many heinous Violations of my Duty, my vile Ungratitude to thee, my greateſt Benefactor, and the great Imperfections of ev'n my beſt Services, and that whatever I have done that is praiſe-worthy, is owing to thy gracious Aſſiſtance, and that of my ſelf I can do nothing that is good. O may I therefore never arrogate to my ſelf what ſhould be wholly thine, nor deſpiſe any Man, like the haughty *Phariſee*, who have nothing my ſelf but what I have receiv'd from thee; but in ſincere Humility of Spirit return thee all the Glory, ſaying, after I have done all that I can, I am ſtill an Unprofitable Servant, and have done but what was my Duty to do. And grant, that in an humble Senſe of my ſtill great Defects, conſidering what vaſt Aſſiſtances I have had, I may ſmite upon my Breaſt, and ſay with the *Publican, God be merciful to me a miſerable Sinner.* Grant this, thou meek and humble Lamb of God, for the ſake of thine own Tender Mercies. *Amen*, and *Amen.*

FINIS.